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THE LIFE

OF OUR

LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST.

FROM THE LATIN

OF

ST. BONAVENTURE.

NEWLY TRANSLATED

FOR THE USE OF

MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

Nos omnes, revelatâ facie gloriam Domini speculantes, in eamdem imaginem transformamur à claritate in claritatem, tanquam à Domini Spiritu.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS.

PAGE

Introduction i

The Life of St. Bonaventure (abridged from the Rev. Alban Butler's Lives of the Saints) . . . xxxiii

Hints for the use of these Meditations . . . xl

On the contemplation of the Humanity of Christ . xliv

St. Bonaventure's Preface 1

CHAPTER

I. The Incarnation of our Lord . . . 9

II. Our Blessed Lady visits her Cousin St. Elizabeth, in whose house the "Magnificat" and "Benedictus" are composed 15

III. How Joseph thought of dismissing Mary; and how God suffers His beloved to be afflicted . . 19

IV. The Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ . 22

V. The Circumcision and Tears of the Infant Jesus . 31

VI. The Epiphany, or Manifestation of our Lord . 34

VII. The Blessed Virgin remains at the Manger till the full term of Forty Days is expired . . 41

VIII. The Purification of the Blessed Virgin . 42

IX. Our Lord's Flight into Egypt . . . 46

X. Our Lord's Return from Egypt . . . 57

XI. The Child Jesus tarries behind in Jerusalem . 62

XII. The Life of our Lord from the Twelfth to the Thirtieth Year of His age . . . 67

XIII. The Baptism of our Lord . . . 76

XIV. Our Lord in the Wilderness . . . 90

XV. Our Lord opens the Book in the Synagogue . 99

XVI. Of our Lord's calling His Disciples . . 101

XVII. Our Lord changes water into wine at the marriage-feast 103

XVIII. Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount . . 108

CHAP.		PAGE
XIX.	Our Lord heals the Centurion's Servant and the Nobleman's Son	112
XX.	Our Lord heals the Paralytic, who is let down through the roof	113
XXI.	Our Lord heals Simon's Mother-in-law	114
XXII.	Our Lord asleep in the ship	115
XXIII.	Our Lord raises the Widow's Son	116
XXIV.	Our Lord raises the Ruler's Daughter; and heals St. Martha	117
XXV.	The Conversion of St. Mary Magdalene	118
XXVI.	St. John the Baptist sends his Disciples to Jesus	123
XXVII.	The Beheading of St. John the Baptist	124
XXVIII.	Our Lord talks with the Woman of Samaria	128
XXIX.	Our Lord's life attempted at Nazareth	130
XXX.	Our Lord heals the Man with the withered Hand	131
XXXI.	Our Lord multiplies the loaves	132
XXXII.	Our Lord flies when the people would make Him king	134
XXXIII.	Our Lord prays upon the mountain; and walks upon the sea	144
XXXIV.	Our Lord heals the Daughter of the Woman of Canaan; how our Guardian Angels faithfully assist us	158
XXXV.	Our Lord's words a cause of offence	162
XXXVI.	On the recompense of those who forsake all	163
XXXVII.	Our Lord inquires of the Disciples what Men say of Him	166
XXXVIII.	The Transfiguration of our Lord on the mount	167
XXXIX.	Our Lord casteth the Buyers and Sellers out of the Temple	168
XL.	Our Lord heals the Sick Man at the Pool of Bethesda	169
XLI.	Our Lord's Disciples pluck the ears of corn	172
XLII.	On the several ministrations of Mary and Martha	173
XLIII.	On the Parable of the Husbandmen in the Vineyard, in which our Lord warns the Jews of the transfer of His Church to the Gentiles	174
XLIV.	The Jews seek to entangle our Lord in His talk	175
XLV.	Our Lord restores a Blind Man to Sight at Jericho	176
XLVI.	Our Lord enters the house of Zacchæus	180

CHAP.		PAGE
XLVII.	Our Lord restores Sight to the Man blind from his birth	181
XLVIII.	How our Lord fled from the Temple, and hid Himself when the Jews would have stoned Him	182
XLIX.	The Jews on another occasion wish to stone Jesus	183
L.	The Raising of Lazarus	184
LI.	The Cursing of the Barren Fig-tree	187
LII.	The Woman taken in Adultery in the Temple	188
LIII.	On the Passion of our Lord in general	189
LIV.	On the Conspiracy of the Jews against Jesus, and on His Flight to the city Ephraim	193
LV.	Our Lord Jesus returns to Bethany, where St. Mary Magdalene anoints His feet	194
LVI.	On our Lord's entry into Jerusalem on an Ass; and how Jesus is related to have wept on three occasions	197
LVII.	On our Lord's Supper. Example of the Five Virtues of Christ at the Supper. Five Points also in our Lord's Discourse	200
LVIII.	Meditation on our Lord's Passion before Day-break	209
LIX.	Meditation on the Passion of our Lord for Sun-rise	215
LX.	Meditation on the Passion of our Lord for the Third Hour	219
LXI.	Meditation on the Passion of our Lord for the Sixth Hour	222
LXII.	Meditation on our Lord's Passion for the Ninth Hour	225
LXIII.	On the Opening of our Lord's Side	228
LXIV.	Meditation for Vespers	229
LXV.	The Hour of Compline	231
LXVI.	Meditation after Compline	235
LXVII.	Holy Saturday; our Lady and her Companions	239
LXVIII.	Holy Saturday; our Lord descends into Hades	242
LXIX.	The Great Easter Day. Our Lord rises, and appears to His Mother	244
LXX.	Magdalene and the other two Maries come to the Sepulchre, and Peter and John run together	245
LXXI.	Our Lord appears to the three Maries	247

CHAP.		PAGE
LXXII.	Our Lord appears to James the Less and to Peter	251
LXXIII.	Our Lord's Return to the Holy Fathers after the Resurrection	252
LXXIV.	Our Lord appears to Two Disciples as they went to Emmaus	253
LXXV.	Our Lord appears to those assembled together on the Day of the Resurrection	256
LXXVI.	Our Lord appears to His Disciples on the Octave Day of Easter, when St. Thomas was with them	258
LXXVII.	Our Lord appears to the Disciples in Galilee	259
LXXVIII.	Our Lord appears to the Disciples at the Sea of Tiberias	260
LXXIX.	Our Lord appears to more than Five Hundred Brethren at once; also on other Appearances	262
LXXX.	The Ascension of our Lord	264
LXXXI.	The Sending of the Holy Ghost	276
LXXXII.	On the Method of Meditating on the Life of Christ, and on the Conclusion of the Work	277

INTRODUCTION.

The work which, with some omissions, is here given in an English form, though well fitted to throw light, incidentally, upon the interpretation of Holy Scripture, has no pretension to the title of an exposition, paraphrase, or harmony, of the Gospel history. Its holy author more than once disclaims the office of a commentator, and deprecates any such undue estimate of his design as must end in disappointment, besides diverting the reader's attention from its great object, which is not to expound Scripture, but to guide and assist the mind in devotional contemplation. To approach these meditations under the idea of finding in them the strict accuracy of a critical exposition, would be like expecting a picture to supply the place of a guide-book or map. And yet, in the same way as a painter, who is not bound down servilely to matters of fact, will sometimes help us to form not only a livelier, but even a truer, idea of a scene or spot, than an historian or topographer, who is; may a work like the present, the characteristic of which is not so much historical accuracy, or fidelity to the letter of Scripture, as a certain pictorial, or (if the word may be used without offence or danger of misunderstanding) dramatic effect, accidentally fulfil the purposes of a commentary even better than a more exact treatise.

St. Bonaventure's Life of our Lord is, in everything but form and structure, rather a sacred poem, or drama, than a mere history. Taking the Gospel narrative as the groundwork of his composition, and carefully confining the excursions of his imagination within the range prescribed by the sacred text as interpreted by the Church, he has yet felt himself at liberty, upon that foundation, and within those limits, to expatiate freely in the field of devout contemplation; following out what in Scripture are mere hints into rich and varied descriptions; amplifying sentences into speeches, or sometimes even throwing his meditations into that form without any direct Scriptural warrant; filling up bare outlines by the addition of circumstances, and supplying vacancies in the inspired narrative by the introduction of probable incidents. As it is intended to enter upon rather a lengthened vindication of this plan, (a course which it is hoped under circumstances may be adopted without the presumption of seeming to apologize for the work of a Saint,) it is best at the outset to describe it faithfully, and, if anything, rather to a disadvantage.

Such, then, being the method which the Saint follows in these meditations, we will now consider what may reasonably be said in objection to it. It may be urged, then, that such a recourse to imagination in filling up the pictures which Scripture has left in outline, is a kind of tampering with holy things; that what the Gospel omits is by the very fact of such omission proved to be what it is needless for us to know, and therefore presumptuous to inquire into; that allowing a licence to invention in such solemn matters is opening a door to countless abuses; that, where Scripture is silent, heretics have as much right to interpose with their supplementary hypotheses as

the Saints with theirs; that it is, in fact, but a mode of colouring Scripture according to the bias of our own minds. Some of these conceivable objections I now purpose to consider directly, and the others by implication. I will begin, however, by saying that such of them as turn upon the danger of subjecting the text of Scripture to the exercise of imagination have at other times occurred forcibly to myself. Yet I will suggest, in the first place, (though merely as an argument *ad hominem*, and in no way as meeting all the difficulties of the case,) that objections to such a design as the present on the score of its admitting imagination into the province of Scripture history, tell with greatly accumulated force against one of the most celebrated and popular works in our literature, in which the poet, with far less of Scriptural warrant for his conceptions than the holy author before us, has exercised a boundless licence of invention upon a subject, far less accessible to devout research, than the Life of our Lord God on earth, (though inclusively in a measure upon this also,) the Counsels of the Eternal Mind upon the Fall and Restoration of Man. If admirers of Milton, then, be startled, in the perusal of the following pages, by finding that St. Bonaventure sometimes puts words even into the mouth of our Divine Redeemer, other than those which Scripture attributes to Him, let them only recur in thought for a moment to some of the colloquies in "Paradise Lost."

Since, however, there are not a few, and they persons deserving of all respect, who will not consider this parallel as any recommendation of the work before us, something shall be added in the hope of resting its claim to acceptance upon a ground which, at all events, involves no compromise of the sacred principles of reverence, and entails no necessary approval of other works,

agreeing, indeed, with it in so far as they admit a certain free play of the imagination in supplying what Scripture has left to be supplied, but surely differing from it (whatever their peculiar merits), as widely as possible, in spirit and design.

Every one who seeks to bring the events related in the Holy Gospels vividly before his mind's eye, does, it is conceived, in forming the picture, introduce as a matter of fact a variety of ideas beside the strict letter of the sacred text. Scripture records certain events, all of which actually took place in a certain way, and with certain accompaniments; and the mind fails to obtain a clear view of these events, till it has formed *some* conception, right or wrong, with respect to that way, and those accompaniments. Nothing, it is obvious, can be less like a *composition* than the Scripture history; it is singularly inartificial, irregular, and unmethodical. This circumstance has often been pressed in the way of "internal evidence;" without insisting upon it in this point of view, there can be no question that it contributes most powerfully to that indescribable grace of simplicity and air of intrinsic truthfulness, which distinguish the inspired narrative from histories in which the facts are more studiously arranged, and more effectively set off. The same peculiarity of the Scripture history is again attested by "harmonies," which are attempts to exhibit synoptically what Scripture presents in scattered and disjointed portions; and are thus not wholly dissimilar either in plan or in use from such a work as that before us, excepting always that, their object being rather critical and expository than devotional, they admit no deviations from the letter. Thus much, however, they shew towards

our present purpose, that the New Testament, as it stands, is in a form unfavourable to distinct ideas of the sacred transactions of which it treats; that what is scattered requires to be collected, and what is latent to be brought into prominence; an admission which forms the justification of the work before us, so far as that work undertakes to throw the notices which Scripture gives of our Blessed Lord into the form of a connected and consecutive biography.

But the design of our holy author being chiefly, as he tells us, devotional, he is not content with furnishing a *sketch* of his solemn subject, but aims at presenting us with a finished picture of it. And, accordingly, he claims the "licence" of a painter, or a poet (who is but a painter in words); the power, namely, of eking out his given materials by the help of details, which in a certain (though very inadequate) sense admit of being characterized as imaginary. Now, that such a process, the subject being what it is, requires a hand of no common delicacy of touch, is what I shall presently maintain; here I would only observe, in anticipation of possible objections, that it cannot be deemed an unwarrantable course, at least by those who are prepared to defend the devotional use of religious *pictures*, properly so called. Which of these, in such measure as it is valuable towards its purpose, does not involve more or less of addition to the strict letter of Scripture? Upon what assignable authority, for instance, do we venture to imagine, or to represent, our Blessed Lord as beautiful in countenance, and graceful in form? "Scripture," it may be answered, "speaks of Him as fairest of the children of men."* "But how know we," it might

* Ps. xlv. 2.

be objected, "that this is not said *spiritually?* Besides, does not Scripture also say, that there was to be 'no beauty nor desirableness in Him?'"* At least, then, Scripture is silent upon the point, if it do not rather run counter to the popular conception of His personal form and appearance. Upon what, then, after all, is that conception grounded? Either upon tradition, or subsequent revelation, or reasonable probability. The very grounds these, let it be observed, among which St. Bonaventure leaves us to choose in vindicating himself against the charge of caprice, or presumption, where he proposes to assist our meditations on the Life of Christ by the suggestion of such particulars, not as Scripture records, but as "might have happened," or "as holy men have believed," upon authority satisfactory to themselves.

But let the reader who may be inclined to object boldness to our Saint's devout speculations, consider well with himself, first, whether he have himself ever *meditated*, strictly speaking, upon points in the Sacred History; i. e. *proposed some event in our Lord's Life on earth,* say His Nativity, or His Temptation, or His Passion, *as an object of direct, and, as far as might be, undistracted contemplation for a certain period of time?* If that period have been as short as five or ten minutes only, let him farther reflect whether he have not brought the solemn transaction home to his mind by the help of innumerable particulars, and even collateral incidents, for the proof of which he would find it hard indeed to lay his hand upon any text of Holy Scripture. If the subject of his meditation were the Nativity, for instance, whence, I ask, did he derive the particulars of his idea (for definite idea he must

* Is. liii. 2.

have formed) of the Blessed Virgin, or of St. Joseph? He conceives, again, of the holy parents, that, at the moment to which his contemplations relate, they are sitting, or standing, or kneeling; where does Scripture say so? And when this is urged, he answers almost impatiently; "Of course not; Scripture cannot descend to such minutiæ. The Blessed Virgin *must* have been in some posture, why not in this? This is the most natural and reasonable. Why may I not please to imagine that she knelt to the Divine Infant when she first beheld Him, and that He smiled on her with a look of uninfantine intelligence? Scripture says that she was humble, and that He, though her Son, was also her God. May I not put these statements together, and draw my own inference from them? You cannot prove me wrong, nor suggest any alternative which is not equally unauthorized, and more improbable. And, at last, what great harm, though I *be* mistaken? I do no violence to the sacred text; I am guilty of no irreverence towards the holy Persons in question, for reverence towards them is the very basis of my supposition; and, for myself, I rise from such meditation, as I trust, holier and better than I went to it; more indifferent to the world, more dissatisfied with myself, and fuller of love to God and my brethren."

Let us consider the subject in another light. How impossible is it to dwell upon the thought of earthly friends at a distance, without continually throwing our ideas of them into definite shape! And again, in picturing them to our imaginations, how little solicitous are we, beyond a certain point, about *accuracy in the details* of our conceptions! We think of those as living, who may possibly be dead; or as at a certain place, who may

perchance be quite in another place; or as engaged in a certain way, who may be quite otherwise occupied. We know, all the time, that we are liable to mistake in these immaterial points; yet we are nothing daunted. For, did we not thus feed on the thought of the absent, we know that we should forget them; such contemplations are at once the natural result of a lively affection, and its constant fuel; they come from it, and they continually reproduce it. And is not our Lord as One "travelling into a far country"? who, when He left us, at a distance from Him, and, moreover, among unsympathizing spirits, and in an uncongenial atmosphere, enjoined us to remember Him? But, again, in thinking of earthly friends who are cut off from us, what is the limit, which our imaginations are as fearful of transgressing, as they are forward to expatiate within it? It is this; consistency with the known character of our beloved. We freely imagine of him as anywise engaged, excepting in some way unworthy of him. And, in Divine matters, the exact counterpart of this controlling principle would be—reverence. It is evidently unimportant to our purpose, whether the subject of our meditation be (as in the case here supposed) the present actions of an absent friend, or, as in that which it is meant to illustrate, the former actions of an abiding One; the point being, that we do, as a matter of fact, in all such cases, fetch from purely imaginary sources those supplementary particulars of our idea, from the certain knowledge of which we are precluded by distance, whether of time, or of place.

I conceive, then, that, in the following work, St. Bonaventure has done no more "for his own profit and for ours" (to use his words) than all who meditate at all, do for themselves; only that he has done as a Saint what

we do as common-place Christians. "Why should it seem a thing incredible" to us, who know that the Holy Spirit is straitened in His communications of Divine Truth by nothing but our want of faith and holiness, that, in ages of greater faith than our own, points other than those expressly recorded in Scripture, though illustrative of them, should have been even supernaturally imparted to men of mortified lives, such as our author, giving themselves up wholly to prayer? But if this appear to some too hard a saying, then let us consider whether we have any settled confidence in such promises as "If any man will do My will, he shall know of the doctrine;" or "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God;" or "God will reveal even this unto you." Or, to take the lowest ground, and treat the question as one of mere secondary causes and effects, I suppose that habitual and reverential study of Holy Scripture, such as we know that men like St. Bernard, or St. Bonaventure, practised, will be allowed to give them, and such as they, a strong claim upon our respectful and attentive hearing in any views which they may have propounded upon the hidden meanings of the inspired text, or the probable, though unrecorded, words and actions of Him, who, as we know, both said and did more than the very world itself would contain,* besides all which we have been expressly told in Scripture concerning Him.

To recapitulate. All meditation upon the solemn facts of the Gospel History seems to involve, in principle, that use of the Divine gift of Imagination in bringing sacred scenes and incidents before the mind, which in this work is recognized to a somewhat greater extent, perhaps, than

* John, xxi. 25.

every one is at first prepared to receive. It will be a great point, however, in our argument to be at liberty to remove the question from one of principle, to one of mere degree. Two inquiries then seem to arise; the first, and indeed preliminary one, whether meditation upon the events of Scripture, as distinct from mere *perusal* of the inspired text, and, again, from meditation on certain other conceivable subjects, be, or be not, a most salutary and even essential religious exercise; the second, whether the Christian meditating shall allow his thoughts to extravagate (since extravagate they will) beyond the very words of Scripture, according to their own bent at the moment, or use some such guide and help as is here furnished to his hands, in directing their course and regulating their movements? The second of these inquiries seems to be answered, or rather anticipated, by the instinct of Christian humility, which must surely prompt the disciple in the school of Christ to mistrust his own power in an exercise, the main qualifications for which are purity of heart and strictness of life; and that more especially, when a Saint comes forward and offers to help him. As to the preliminary question, whether the power of meditation be a point for the Christian to aim at, and whether the *events*, as distinct, for instance, from the doctrinal truths, of Scripture, or, again, our own spiritual state and history, be a fit subject of it; this, too, would surely receive but one answer, if early prejudices and floating opinions, the "traditions of men" rather than the "rudiments of Christ," and though last, not least, our own indolent dispositions and ways, had not done so much to obstruct, or retard, our admission even of the most self-evident propositions in matters of practical religion. For can any one suppose that such surprising *unreality* (only not more

surprising because we live in the midst of it) as undoubtedly prevails, even among persons in a certain sense religious, with respect to the facts of Sacred History, could have grown up, had we all been accustomed from our youth, to live *in*, and not on the edge of, the solemn scenes which the Holy Ghost has put on record for our "instruction in righteousness," and that, too, with no common minuteness of detail, even on the page of the Gospels themselves? Surely this circumstance arises from our dealing with Scripture as a sort of literature, rather than as a body of holy truths which we should seek continually to make part of our very minds and souls. We have come to talk, the poor especially, of "reading a chapter," as if there were something meritorious in the act, however performed; and, the task ended, the reader too often "straightway forgets" what Scripture was given to teach him, his own nothingness and God's adorable greatness and goodness. I cannot but suspect that ignorance of the Gospel History prevails to a fearful extent even among (I will not say, those who lay an exclusive stress upon the office of the Written Word as a Teacher of Divine Truth, though I fear among these also, but among) ourselves, who have the daily opportunity of listening to it in the public Service. And one reason of this is, that we esteem it a great matter to "hear the Word" instead of "*receiving* it," according to the beautiful expression in the Litany, "with pure affection," the only way, surely, to make it effectual towards "bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit." We "hear it with our outward ears," we do not seek that the holy seed may be lodged deep in our hearts. And this, again, is, because we attempt too much; reading on and on, as if we could profit by our "much read-

ing;" as if there were some point in the amount, rather than in the way. Surely, if grace be promised, (and often, as we trust, it is accorded,) even to the attentive reading, or hearing, of Scripture, much more might it be expected to follow upon the attempt to *possess ourselves*, even though but of some one or two of its amazing disclosures; so as to make them part of our regular and available stock of impressions, forming our spiritual sight upon their model, with a view to surveying the objects around under a new form and as invested with a new colour. To this end it were surely most important that we should accustom ourselves, as an act of devotion, to dwell for a certain period, with the aid of all proper appliances of place, time, posture, and the like, upon single incidents in Scripture, especially incidents in our Lord's Life, His Nativity, for instance, or His Passion, or His Resurrection; so as, in St. Francis de Sales' beautiful language, to "gather" from the exercise "a nosegay" of devotion, whose fragrance might stimulate us in our work, or refresh us with thoughts of our Home in the barren wilderness of the world. Neither, one should think, can any subjects be more suitable to the ends of meditation than the events in our Lord's history; representing, as they do, the infinite perfections of God *in action*, not in the abstract merely; and thus giving scope for that steady contemplation of the "Author and Finisher of our faith," of which the Apostle speaks as the appointed stay and solace of our pilgrimage.*

Again, it is not as if Scripture had left us without clues to meditation upon the Sacred History, even where it leaves us to make such use of these clues as our devo-

* Heb. xii. 2.

tion, or rather as the Holy Spirit helping our infirmities and praying with us, may suggest. How often do the inspired writers, or rather He who speaks in and through them, strike as it were some two or three chords of a sacred theme, and then leave to the spiritual student the delightful task of framing the entire harmony for himself, at once guiding and guarding his devout invention, without forcing and ruling it! Why in such cases does Scripture go so far in its disclosures without going farther? Why so far, if it be not to prompt holy musings? why no farther, except there be some especial value in the freedom and spontaneousness of those musings? It is the very method of Scripture to teach by hints, which are lost upon the thoughtless, but eloquent to the wise; which they therefore are pretty sure to turn to a good account, who turn them to any; the devotion which is real enough to use them at all, being for the most part instructed enough to use them aright. This, however, does not make guidance in so delicate a process the less acceptable to humble and serious Christians, who naturally desire to perform so solemn an exercise not only well, but in the most perfect manner which their circumstances admit.

One or two instances will serve to clear our meaning. The holy Evangelist relates, that the Blessed Virgin, when she went to visit her cousin St. Elizabeth, travelled "with haste." * Why was this? It was out of keeping with her usual calm deportment and orderly movements. St. Bonaventure offers a reason, which, whether the true one or not, supplies a very beautiful and appropriate ground of meditation: "She was loth," he supposes, "in

* Ἀναστᾶσα .... ἐπορεύθη μετὰ σπουδῆς. Gr.

her great modesty and love of retirement, to be seen long abroad." Again, we read, that the wise men offered our Lord in His infancy "gold" among other produce of their country; and we gather from intimations that it was very considerable. May we not innocently and profitably reflect upon the use to which these treasures were applied? What became of all this gold? For we cannot suppose that what was offered in such sort was thanklessly cast aside. Yet there are, as we know, but two sacred uses to which such gifts of Divine bounty are applicable; the service of the Sanctuary, and the benefit of the poor. But when the Lord of the Temple was in the holy tabernacle of His flesh, there was no need of "temples made with hands" to enshrine His glory, nor of the gold which those Temples sanctify, to symbolize the riches of His mercy. Our Saint then devoutly imagines that these consecrated treasures supplied to the Blessed Mother of our Lord the means of discharging that one duty from which the estate of poverty is precluded—bountiful almsgiving. Again, Holy Scripture says, that our Blessed Lord, after the discourse with the doctors in the Temple, "was subject unto" His holy parents. Can there be any presumption in attempting to conceive in what ways our Lord was thus subject to them? Does not Scripture seem, by the very fact of saying that He was so, to stimulate such a reverent and devout curiosity? Does it not, again, by the exceeding minuteness with which it has recorded the circumstances of the Adorable Passion, seem to direct us to a like method of studying other points in our Lord's Life of Humiliation? Scripture cannot tell us everything, but it tells us enough to guide where it does not inform. Moreover, Scripture does not, indeed, particularize the sort of life which the

Holy Family led at Nazareth; but it does imply that the parents of our Lord were of the poorest: and when it also says that He "became poor for our sakes," and took upon Him "the form of a servant," and "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister," there is every reason for understanding these words in their most obvious sense, of literal poverty, and literal servitude. Upon these passages, which are yet all of them rather suggestive than descriptive, St. Bonaventure founds those exquisite meditations upon our Lord's childhood, boyhood, and early youth, which will be found, with whatever drawbacks from translation, in their place in the following pages. Again, Scripture says, that, after our Lord's Temptation in the Wilderness, "Angels came and ministered unto Him." If we are to conceive of their ministry, we must also conceive of the way in which they ministered; surely it is profitable, with all reverence, to do so. On first thoughts, I suppose, we should all say that these ministrations were spiritual alone. Yet this seems an unreal view, considering that our Lord came in the likeness of sinful flesh, all but its sin; that He was tempted like unto us, and that the Sacred History has just before recorded for our instruction, that He was "an hungered." Our Saint, pondering these words, and again reading elsewhere in Scripture of the employment of Angels in the carrying of food to God's elect, devises a sweet conception, that such was one mode in which these blessed comforters ministered to our Lord. But farther, whence did they seek this food? Our author carries them, in the same strain of devotional poetry, to the little dwelling at Nazareth, and introduces into the scene our Lord's Blessed Mother (who had for the twenty and nine years before ministered to her Divine Son with

devout reverence and affection) as the associate of the Angels in this work of earthly consolation towards Him, who, though He were not "of the earth earthy, but the Lord from heaven," yet vouchsafed for our sakes to "empty Himself" for a time, of the exclusive prerogatives of His Divine Nature. This instance has been selected as well for other reasons, as because it is one of the strongest which occur in the following pages, of addition to Scripture, and presumes an interpretation of the sacred text for which our minds are, I think, not at once prepared.

There are, however, two points for contemplation retained in the following pages, which may require a distincter notice, as being less of the nature of what may be called (in a very solemn sense) *meditative poetry*, than *actual traditionary impressions of the Catholic Church*, supplemental to the text of Scripture. 1. The Appearance of our Lord upon the Day of His Resurrection to His Mother. 2. His announcement of His Resurrection to the blessed "Spirits in prison," the holy Fathers, and deliverance of them from their state of expectancy. With respect then to the first; That such an Appearance there was, although not recorded in the Holy Gospels, it seems almost a result of natural piety to suppose. That She, whose blessed soul had been pierced through and through at the Crucifixion, and who had been remembered on the cross in her own especial relation, when the beloved Apostle was consigned to her as a Mother, should yet have been left without the consolation of an interview with her glorified Son, when all the Apostles, and the other holy women, and St. Mary Magdalene, and others, were thus favoured, is, it may safely be said, immeasurably more at variance with what may be called religious pro-

bability, than that such interview should not have been recorded. Nothing whatever can be gathered as to the occurrence or non-occurrence of a fact from the silence of Scripture; especially when the Holy Spirit expressly says, on two separate occasions, and both times immediately in connexion with the history of the Resurrection, that our Lord did many more things than are written.* Surely the New Testament bears no appearance whatever of being a complete or formal system of teaching; each inspired writer seems to "speak as he is moved," at the time, without reference to the consistency of the several portions of the actual Sacred Volume, as it has since been collected and promulgated by the Church. How does the special Appearance of our Lord to St. Peter after His Resurrection "come out" in Scripture, but by the most incidental mention of the circumstance in the First Epistle to the Corinthians falling in with a yet more incidental mention of it in the Gospels? How casually does St. Paul in the same passage *drop*, as it were, that our Lord appeared to St. James! But it will be said that Scripture is mysteriously silent about the Blessed Virgin. That it is more silent than we should expect, did we come to it, rather than to the Church as evolving it, for instruction in Divine Truth, may be readily allowed; but except upon that hypothesis, which Catholics cannot receive, its silence upon this subject proves no more than its silence upon any other matter of ancient belief besides that of the honour due to St. Mary, *e. g.* the use of prayers for the dead. Is not this argument, grounded upon the absence from the page of Scripture of such

* John, xx. 30; xxi. 25.

notices as we might expect about St. Mary, one of those which, as the saying is, "prove too much?" Is it not prejudicial to her *acknowledged* claim—acknowledged, I believe, by the ancient Fathers, and certainly by many of our own divines—to all such reverence as is short of adoration? Moreover, if the silence of Scripture upon the high claims of St. Mary be mysterious, (let it be remembered, however, that Scripture is not panegyrical,) are not the Scripture *intimations* of that "blessed among women" strangely significant also? Let the reader turn in thought to the narratives of the Annunciation, of the Visitation, of the Marriage of Cana, of the Crucifixion, and again to the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles,* and surely he will remember passages which are at least *suggestive* of very wonderful thoughts concerning the Mother of God.†

Moreover, there is precisely the same extent and kind of silence in the three former Gospels as to the Blessed Virgin's presence at the Crucifixion which all four preserve upon our Lord's Appearance to her after the Resurrection. Other holy women are mentioned by name, both as present at the Crucifixion, and as assisting at the Burial, and watching at the Tomb; but of her there is not even a hint. Can anything seem more like purposed exclusion? Is there any conceivable amount of traditionary proof, or ecclesiastical impression, which, by those who stipulate for direct Scripture evidence, would have

* v. 14.

† In Mr. Newman's "Sermons bearing on Subjects of the Day," p. 36—43, will be found a deep view on our Lord's mysterious sayings relative to His Blessed Mother, as connected with His Ministry, which would bring them into strict harmony with the belief of her ineffable dignity.

been held sufficient to outweigh the circumstance of a silence so complete, and apparently so pointed? Then comes the beloved Apostle, and discovers to us the Holy Mother just where piety would have anticipated, in the *place of honour*, as it were, admitted to the most intimate communion with the sacred Passion, and singled out among the whole female company for special notice and high privilege. There is reason, then, to think that the absence of St. Mary's name from the accounts of the Resurrection, far from implying any slur upon her, is even a token of honour; and imports rather that she was signally favoured, than that she was postponed to others. Certainly the fact of total silence is beyond measure more arresting than would have been that of passing mention.

Upon the grounds of that silence it would be of course presumptuous to speculate; yet it may be observed how great is the difference between meditating upon the acts and privileges of St. Mary as matter of distinct *revelation*, and merely of *pious conjecture*. It may be, that minds so feeble and undiscriminating as ours, would have been unequal to the task of dwelling upon so tangled and delicate a theme as a *certainty*, while yet it would by no means follow that the withholding of knowledge (properly so called) is tantamount to the discouragement of *contemplation*. Does not this denial of perfect satisfaction to our curiosity tend to infuse into our meditations that special element of indefiniteness, which, in this very peculiar case, may be the necessary condition of the benefit to be derived from them; and, by removing the subject from the province of history into that of poetry, (not discredit it, but merely) obviate the temptations to a confused and unspiritual view of it? Had acts of the Blessed Virgin been recorded, one by one, as those of our

Lord have been, they had seemed so like His own, that we had been tempted to forget her immeasurable distance from Him. They had been the acts of *a perfect human nature not in union with the Divine*, and thus essentially different, at once, from those of our Lord, and from those of the Apostles. There would not have been, as in the latter, the imperfection of humanity to temper our veneration, nor, as in Him, the Divine Nature to justify our worship. St. Mary was the very mirror of the Divine perfections *in human nature;* reflecting the Divine Image (as in a measure all Christians do) with a faithfulness to which other Saints have but approximated (with whatever closeness), the while she was but a Woman. On the acts and privileges of such an one, it might have been unsafe for us to dwell, had they been brought before us in the full blaze, as it were, of revealed light. Yet it is plain that meditating on them to whatever extent as mere *deductions* from revealed truth is absolutely different in kind from meditating on them as *revealed facts*. That Scripture has drawn a veil over them, may be fully granted; but it has still to be proved that this veil is meant to conceal the light from our eyes, and not merely to adapt it to their feeble powers.

But it will be said, that Scripture is not only silent about any Appearance of our Lord after His Resurrection prior to that with which St. Mary Magdalene was favoured, but speaks of the Appearance to St. Mary Magdalene as the first. "Now when Jesus was risen, early the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene . . . and she went and told them that had been with Him."* I cannot think, however, that, read

* Mark, xvi. 9, 10.

naturally, this text would ever have been thought to contradict the belief in a prior appearance. Did Scripture indeed speak emphatically and with a controversial object, no doubt the word "first" would be meant not only to assert, but to exclude. If, on the other hand, we suppose a writer to be speaking with reference to the point just before him, and no other, we can, I think, perfectly understand the use of the word "first," without any emphatic or preclusive meaning whatever; or rather I would say, that the context added to other intimations of Holy Scripture, render such an interpretation of this text not merely a possible, but even the more natural, one. St. Mary Magdalene, says the Evangelist, went and told *them that had been with Him, as they mourned and wept;*" thus seeming to draw our attention to *prior* claims which *they* had, to see Him on His Rising. "Yet," the Evangelist seems to say, "they did not actually see Him before they had heard of His Resurrection from another." Moreover, the Greek word is not πρώτη, but πρῶτον, which, in the New Testament, if I mistake not, almost invariably means, not "very first," or "first of all," but "first of the following," *i. e.* "before." *

As to the Meditation on the Visit to the holy Fathers after the Resurrection, it has been preserved in the present translation for the following reasons:—The devout soul is ever with its Lord, picturing Him in some act of bounty, or some attitude of love. It will, it must, think of Him, who is its Life; and it is the property of Love to cling to those who come with the mere profession of news from its Beloved, and to catch even at rumours,

* Cf. S. Matt. v. 24; vii. 5; xii. 29; xvii. 10; xxiii. 26; Acts, xxvi. 20; Rom. i. 8, &c.

where it is denied assurance. Having, then, been with its Lord in His Passion, following Him throughout each variety of pain and grief, the soul will not be kept from its appointed consolation of dwelling on Him with a like intentness in the season of His glory on earth; yet dwell on Him in the abstract it cannot; it must conceive of Him under certain accidents, and in certain relations, and for these it must draw upon other than directly Scriptural sources. Why, again, but as if to invite such devout inquiries, does Scripture repeat that He performed in those eventful forty days so many more wondrous and gracious acts than it has room for? Again, if there were any period since the Incarnation upon which it would have seemed beforehand bold to speculate, it would surely be that of the Three Days between Good Friday and Easter. Yet Scripture itself has vouchsafed, in its own natural and casual way, to intimate how our Divine Lord was employed in that interval;* thus teaching us that there is no time so blank but His restless Love can devise a work for it. And towards what object does Holy Scripture itself more plainly direct our thoughts during this period, than that of a visit to the Saints of the elder Covenant? The souls of those who die in sanctity, since Christ has come, are at once, as the Church has ever believed, in bliss. St. Stephen "saw heaven opened" for him, even before His death; St. Paul longed to be "with Christ." Not so those Saints who died *before* the "Day of Christ," else would they not so anxiously have expected that Day, and "rejoiced and been glad in it" by anticipation. But what then was this Day of Christ, but the Day of days, the Day which the Lord Himself made glorious,

* 1 Peter, iii. 19.

and in which the whole Church rejoices and is glad; the Day of His Resurrection? It is the coming of this great and desirable Day, which, according to the old Catholic view, our Lord went to announce on the Easter morning in that place of the departed, where, on Holy Saturday, He had "preached" the completion of His Sufferings, while His victory was as yet incomplete. Here then the Saint is but following out a train of thought suggested by Scripture, and sanctioned by the current opinion of the Church. Neither do we, on our side, seem forbidden, in a matter thus indifferent, to accompany Him if we please; while yet it must be remembered that nothing in these pages is attempted to be *forced* upon those whose minds do not rather outstrip, than merely not recoil from, the hint.

If these considerations, offered in all diffidence, shall tend to relieve the following pages from the effects of any adverse prepossession, it will be a full compensation for the pain of seeming to imply even trivial differences with any of my brethren, and of ushering in such a work as the present with discussions of a seemingly controversial sound, and ephemeral application.

In such measure as these Meditations, or any portion of them, may avail towards bringing their solemn Subject home to the devout student's mind, in a livelier shape and more practical connexion than any more simply critical exposition, they will answer the great purpose with which they were composed, and with which, if the editor may presume to speak of himself in the same breath with the writer, they are now commended, in a somewhat altered form, to the English reader. But there is one characteristic of them, in common with all Catholic devotions on the subject of our Lord, which

seems to give them a peculiar value in our own Church at the present moment; the manner in which they present to contemplation the several features of the Blessed Humanity with a prevailing recognition of the Divine Personality. Among the heresies, upon the brink of which we stand, a certain Nestorianism is far from being one of the least rife, as it is certainly one of the most fearful. This peculiar spirit, the absence of a firm and confident grasp of the great doctrine of our Lord's Divine Personality, seems to operate in different ways according to the character of the mind which it influences. The less reverent fall, under it, into a painfully familiar way of speaking upon our Lord's actions as Man, just as if, according to a distinction which a living writer has drawn, He were "a man," as any other man, and not GOD made Man. Thus persons speak of Him in words which can hardly be breathed without profanation, as the "greatest of men," or the like, as though mere heroism might be predicated of Him, who was Perfect GOD in every the least and lowliest of His actions on earth. It is needless, as it would be ungracious, to refer directly to instances of this (often unconscious) profaneness, which will readily suggest themselves.

With reverent minds, however, this loose hold of Catholic doctrine operates in quite another, far less dangerous, and yet very dangerous, way. Not starting with a confident possession of the great Athanasian Verity, that our Lord was ONE CHRIST, "not by the conversion of the GODHEAD into flesh, but by taking of the Manhood into GOD," they are, so to say, shy of confronting the doctrine of the Perfect Humanity in all its bearings and necessary consequences. They cannot think of our Blessed Lord, *at least in detail*, as Perfect Man, without

an apprehension (worthy in them of all respect) lest what they give to the idea of His Humanity should be so much deducted from that of His Divinity. Thus they tend, however unconsciously, and at whatever distance from formal heresy, to reduce the Manhood of our Lord to a kind of shadowy existence. It has occurred, for example, to the writer of these remarks, to meet with an excellent member of our Church, who expressed himself fearful of contemplating pictures of the Crucifixion, as tending to lower his ideas of our Divine Redeemer. Again, one may conceive a person being shocked at first by a beautiful print of Overbeck's, in which our Lord is represented as doing menial work in the house at Nazareth. I have before adverted to the same kind of feeling as opposed to the hearty reception of some of the details in these Meditations; *e. g.* the Angelic supply of natural food after the Temptation in the Wilderness.* Any such misgivings will assuredly tell seriously against the effect of the following treatise; for the holy author, like Catholic writers in general, and if the present remarks are well founded, just in proportion as they are Catholic, puts forwards the features of the Sacred Humanity with a freedom which to some may savour of irreverence; nay which, except in a writer strongly and habitually

* Milton, in the Paradise Regained, understands the text of *spiritual* ministrations. I hope it may be said, without unkindness or unfairness towards that gifted writer, that this interpretation, whether otherwise true or not, is not recommended by the circumstance of its seeming to him the more natural. As a mere question of criticism, were we not here engaged with a very different subject, it might be deeply interesting to compare the course of the poet's meditations on this Divine theme with that of the Saint's. No words can be adequate to the danger of such exercises of imagination, where not kept in check by an abiding spirit of reverence.

imbued with the belief of the Divine Personality, would undoubtedly imply it.

The design of St. Bonaventure's work is not, as is well known, without a counterpart in our own Church. Had the celebrated treatise of Bishop Jeremy Taylor on the "Life of Christ" been cast in a somewhat more accessible and attractive form, it would have gone far to supply the want which the present publication is intended to meet; but thoughtful and eloquent as that treatise is, and moreover replete with passages of a vividness, ardour, and affectionateness without parallel in the later English theology, its merits are on the whole of a somewhat different order from those of the work here translated. Yet there seems reason for concluding that St. Bonaventure's Meditations were at all events not unknown to the learned author of the "Life of Christ," even if they did not suggest to him the idea of his plan. Bishop Taylor was evidently well read in the writings of St. Bernard, as well as, of course, in those of the earlier Fathers; and in the course of his mediæval researches it is hardly credible that a work similar in design to his own should have escaped his notice. Occasionally, too, he follows out Scriptural hints in the same track with the Saint before us, and once, at least, incorporates into his subject the very traditions to which St. Bonaventure also refers.* And, although for the most part he confines himself rigidly to the inspired text, yet his work gives many proofs of the great inconvenience, nay, absolute impracticability, of such a restriction in the case of a

* *E. g.* of the prostration of the idols in Egypt upon the appearance of our Lord; and of the period during which the exile of the Holy Family continued.

lively imagination, and affectionate heart like his. Moreover, although Bishop Taylor does not dwell upon points which St. Bonaventure makes the groundwork of distinct and highly wrought pictures, he yet seems to authorize some, even of the more recondite among the views upon which the Saint has proceeded; for instance, that upon the character of the Angelic ministrations in the Wilderness, and again of the Appearance to the Blessed Virgin after the Resurrection. What more, for instance, can the Catholic desire for the justification of St. Bonaventure's devout conceptions upon the latter of these subjects than the belief that "as our Lord had comforted the souls of the Fathers with the presence of His Spirit, so now He saw it to be time *to bring comfort to His holy Mother*, to reestablish the tottering faith of His disciples, to verify His promises, to lay the superstructure of His Church upon firmer foundations,"* &c. &c. Yet how, it may be asked, did the Resurrection bring comfort to our Lord's Mother if she alone, of all His favoured ones, was denied the privilege of seeing Him?

In point of closeness to Scripture and suitableness for general use, the work of Bishop Taylor is surpassed by a practical harmony of the Gospels, and especially of the narrative of our Lord's Passion, which has appeared within these two or three years. Yet, as I have mentioned this latter work, I feel myself also reluctantly obliged to except, as a matter of individual feeling, against certain passages in it, which, besides introducing the student into those regions of controversy, from which in devotion, if anywhere, he might look to be withdrawn, appear to me deficient in reverence towards the

* Bp. Taylor's Life of Christ, Pt. iii. sect. 16.

Mother of God, and that blessed Apostle to whom was consigned the keeping of Christ's flock. And altogether, perhaps, the work in question, deeply religious as it is in general tone, is somewhat too critical and *tentative* in its plan, to satisfy the devotional needs of every mind.

The Meditations now laid before the English reader have been adapted to the presumed wants of our Church under that conflict of feelings which all who have been engaged in the same kind of task will fully appreciate; on the one hand, of a desire to omit nothing which might profit, on the other, to retain nothing which might offend and perplex. The same parties will also understand the extreme difficulty which besets the attempt to act upon the latter of these wishes; offence in some quarters being the necessary condition, under actual circumstances, of edification in others. Again, it needs but little experience in such trials to know the absolute impossibility of anticipating the course, still more of obviating the tide, of objection; depending as it does upon the incalculable varieties of feeling under which books are read by an indefinite number of readers. We live, too, it needs not to be said, in days, of which criticism and suspicion (whether with good, or with evil, design and effect) are even characteristic. We have lost, from circumstances, that temper which some feel so essential to goodness as well as to happiness, the temper of *confidence*. Our own Church, which we long to love with the most devout affection, and to confide in with the most unreserved submission, will not allow us, so far as she comes before us in her actual bearings, to trust her; and, without trust, love must ever languish. The necessary condition of confidence in the children is oneness in the mind, and harmony in the tones, of the Mother. The Church

of England, our Mother, (as she comes before us, not as we might conceive of her,) is of many minds and many, nay, contradictory voices. Hence they who cannot live without trust, are driven upon reposing their trust elsewhere than in the existing, energizing system; whether in the Idea of the Ancient Church, or in the living Church as elsewhere manifested, or in the Saints of the Church collectively, or in some particular Saint, or, again, some living teacher, or model of sanctity, who may seem to be especially commended to their confidence. Yet the process of *unsettling* which the course of recent circumstances has necessarily brought with it, although not without its compensations and its remedies, has undoubtedly given a shock to the mind of our Church, the effects of which are obviously and experimentally apparent. Many of us, perhaps, are tempted to trust some one object, be it system, or theory, or individual, with too little care to adjust the relative claims of many, and thus, while confiding in spirit on the whole, are apt to be critical and suspicious, where we ought rather to confide. And if the confiding be in danger of the spirit of criticism, they (and such there are) who make a merit of confiding implicitly on nothing, will be even wholly swayed by it. Such, then, are the difficulties with which we have to contend; if we will not, as we cannot, sail with the stream. Individual writers, or editors, whose acts, without their protestations, and in spite of their laments, should in all fairness protect them against the charge of undutifulness towards their own Church, must still put up with such charges, or violate their consciences by expressing reverence where they cannot feel it, or withdrawing confidence where they cannot but repose it. Well indeed may they bear with such reproaches, (espe-

cially when tempered with so much more of confidence and kindness in other quarters than they have any right to expect,) since even the Saints themselves are objects of jealousy and suspicion, or, at best, of what, though far more reverent, is perhaps even less intelligible, than more open animadversion, a kind of patronizing and apologetic tone of criticism, as "men better than their system," or the like. And yet the Saints were certainly either more or less than this tone of modified animadversion seems to presume; more, and so to be venerated, or less, and so to be denounced. Their characteristics at least are not equivocal; their holiness was either the most glorious of works, or the subtlest of counterfeits; their devotion, the nearest approach which earth admits to a perpetual "conversation in heaven," or a deliberate and systematic infringement of the honours due to God alone. And whatever the Saints were, it was the Church who made them what they so were; her honour or disgrace is intimately and inseparably bound up with theirs; they imbibed her lessons with the most devout reverence, yielded to her authority with the most implicit submission; they were cradled on her lap, "sucked the breasts of her consolations," were sustained through her Sacraments, died in her arms. Was ever mother more absolute? Were ever children more dutiful? What pretence then for discriminating between her and them? If she had played false to her Lord, (alas, that we should be driven upon the discussion of hypotheses, which can hardly be even so much as imagined without pollution!) then were they nothing else than "children of the sorceress." But if they were a holy generation, yea, the holiest among the holy, then was she nothing less than the chaste and immaculate Spouse of Christ.

Still, whatever the difficulty of selecting, it has been felt imperative to admit nothing into the following pages, which, after the most anxious endeavours to strike a balance between what seemed conflicting claims of duty, was thought on the whole less likely to edify than to startle. The object of the work not being historical, nor literary, but immediately practical; not to record facts, which are as they are, and which it may be a duty to exhibit in their true colours, however unacceptable, nor to discharge an office of editorial fidelity, (what is given being intended, not to suggest certain conclusions only indirectly practical, but to supply a manual for devotional use) it was felt right to introduce nothing which the Editor could not recommend to all others, as well as receive himself. The consequence has been, that passages have been here and there omitted, not on doctrinal grounds, (which do not come into question in this particular work,) but as somewhat more extreme instances of the principle, now sought to be vindicated, than, it was felt, would carry their own justification with them, at least till the principle itself be more generally understood and recognized. And perhaps it may without presumption be hoped, that the blessed Saint with whose work these liberties have been unwillingly taken, will acquit, at least of all intentional irreverence towards himself, this seeming act of it; hazarded, as it is, at all events in that spirit of charity which he illustrated, and with the hope of furthering those sacred ends of unity and peace, to which, as we cannot doubt, he would desire to contribute.

The present translation is almost entirely new. It was hoped at first that one already in use among those who can receive St. Bonaventure's work entire, might

have been altered so as to suit the wants of our own Church. But, on recurring to the original, it was found better to retranslate almost throughout, than to attempt a reconstruction and adaptation of the existing version.

It may be well to add, that the text of the Vulgate has never been used in the following pages except where necessary to the illustration of the context; and that the quotations from the Psalms have been made in the words of the Prayer Book, rather than of the Bible, as the more familiar to our ears.

F. O.

London,
Lent, 1844.

THE LIFE OF ST. BONAVENTURE,

CARDINAL, BISHOP, AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH.

(Abridged from the Rev. Alban Butler's Lives of the Saints.)

St. Bonaventure, the great light and ornament of the Order of St. Francis, for his extraordinary devotion, charity, and skill in sacred learning, is surnamed the Seraphic Doctor. He was born at Bagdarea in Tuscany, in the year 1221, of pious parents; and was christened by the name of John; but he afterwards received that of Bonaventure on the following occasion. In the fourth year of his age he fell so dangerously ill, that his life was despaired of. His mother in excessive grief had recourse to Almighty God by earnest prayer, and, going into Umbria, cast herself at the feet of St. Francis of Assisium, with many tears, begging his intercessions with God for the life of her son. St. Francis was moved to compassion; and at his prayer the child recovered so perfect a state of health, that he was never known to ail from that time, till the illness of which he died. The glorious saint, at whose petition God granted this favour, saw himself near the end of his mortal course, and foretelling the graces which the Divine Goodness prepared for this child, cried out in a prophetic rapture; *O buonaventura;* that is, *O happy event.* Whereupon the name of Bonaventure was given to the child. The devout mother in gratitude consecrated her son to God by a vow, and was

careful to instil into him from the cradle most ardent sentiments of piety, and to inure him to the constant practice of self-denial, humility, obedience, and devotion. Bonaventure from his infancy appeared to glow with the love of God, and aspired with all his might to religious perfection, at an age when others have hardly reached the use of reason. His progress in his studies was extraordinary: but his highest pleasure and satisfaction was to learn by how many titles he belonged to God, and to tend towards Him in all his actions. At twenty-two years of age he entered the Order of St. Francis. Shortly after he was sent to Paris to complete his studies, under the celebrated Alexander of Hales, an Englishman, surnamed the Irrefragable Doctor. St. Bonaventure soon became a masterly proficient in the scholastic philosophy, and in the highest branches of theology. All his studies he accompanied with the most fervent aspirations of divine love; never gave way to idle curiosity; and constantly had before his eyes the cross of Christ. St. Thomas Aquinas, coming one day to pay a visit to him, asked him in what books he had learned his sacred science? The servant of God, pointing to his crucifix, said; "This is the source of all my knowledge. I study only Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified."

Not content with making his studies in some sort a continuation of prayer, he devoted entirely to that heavenly exercise the greater part of his time; knowing this to be the key of divine graces and of a spiritual life. Such was the innocence and purity in which he lived, and so perfect a mastery had he obtained over his passions, that Alexander of Hales used to say of him, that he seemed not to have sinned in Adam. His mortifications were excessive; yet, amidst his penitential tears, a

remarkable cheerfulness always appeared in his countenance, the result of inward peace. His humility made him ambitious of serving the sick in the lowest and most repulsive offices. In this charitable duty he seemed prodigal of his own health and life, and chose always to be about those whose distempers were most loathsome or contagious. He was sometimes withheld from the Holy Table through the apprehension of his own unworthiness, notwithstanding the burning desires of his soul to be united to the Object of his love, and to approach the Fountain of grace. But God was pleased, as we learn from the acts of his canonization, to interpose for his comfort by a miracle.

St. Bonaventure prepared himself to receive the holy order of priesthood by long fasts and fervent prayer. He considered that sacred dignity with fear and trembling; and, when invested with it, he approached the altar with the profoundest sentiments of reverence and the most tender love; as appeared by his tears, and his whole exterior deportment. The word of God he announced to the people with an extraordinary energy and unction, which enkindled a flame of devotion in the hearts of those who heard him. He taught privately in his own convent, till he succeeded his late master, John of Rochelle, in a public chair of the university. The age required for this professorship was thirty-five; whereas the Saint was only thirty-three: but his abilities amply supplied his want of age; and he soon displayed them to the admiration of the whole Church. In 1256 St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure were invited to receive the doctor's cap together. Others contend for precedence; but the two saints had a vehement contest of humility, each desiring to yield the first place to the other. At length

St. Thomas consented, at the earnest entreaties of St. Bonaventure, to receive the degree first; and thus the latter triumphed over both his friend and himself.

That holy king, St. Louis of France, honoured St. Bonaventure with his particular esteem; often inviting him to his table, and consulting him on intricate matters of business, so entire was the confidence he reposed in his advice. St. Bonaventure's Office of the Passion was drawn up by the express desire of St. Louis.* He also drew up a rule for St. Isabella the king's sister, and for her nunnery of mitigated Clares at Long Champs. In all his writings he discovers throughout the very deepest spirit of humility, the most burning charity, and all other Christian virtues.

The eternal joys of heaven were the frequent subject of his holy and happy contemplations; and he endeavoured in his works to excite in all others a like fervent desire of heavenly blessedness. In 1256, whilst he continued to teach at Paris, he was chosen general of his Order at Rome. He was then but thirty-five years old. He was thunder-struck at the news; and, prostrating himself on the ground, with many tears implored the Divine light and counsel. He then set out for Rome. He reconciled the differences which began at that time to appear among his brethren; some crying out for a mitigation of the severity of their rule; others as loudly condemning it: but, under this new Joshua, they all marched with one heart and one spirit, in the same path of perfection. In his way back to Paris, he visited several convents, and showed, on all occasions, that he

* An English translation of this Office has lately been published.

was become Superior, only to be the most humble, the most charitable, and most compassionate of all his brethren, and the servant of his whole Order. Amidst his great employments he often found leisure to retire to Mante for greater solitude. A stone which he used for his pillow, was shown in that convent down to the time of the French revolution. At the request of the friars assembled in a general chapter at Narbonne, he undertook to write the life of St. Francis: and St. Thomas going one day to pay him a visit while he was employed in this work, saw him through the door of his cell raised in contemplation above the ground, and going away, said; "Let us leave a saint to write upon a saint." To propagate the honour of God and His saving faith, St. Bonaventure sent preachers by the Pope's authority into many barbarous nations, only lamenting that he could not go himself and expose his life for the salvation of poor infidels.

Venerable Brother Giles, the third companion of St. Francis at Assisium, said one day to St. Bonaventure, "Father, what can we poor ignorant souls do to show our gratitude for the infinite blessings of God, and to gain salvation?" St. Bonaventure answered, "If God were to bestow on any one no other talents besides the grace of loving Him, this alone suffices, and is an abundant spiritual treasure." Brother Giles said, "Can a dull idiot love God as perfectly as a great scholar?" St. Bonaventure replied, "A poor old woman may love Him more than the most learned master and doctor in theology." At this, Brother Giles, in a sudden fervour and joyfulness of spirit, went into a garden, and looking towards the city (of Rome) cried out with a loud voice, "Come the poorest, the most simple, and most illiterate

among old women, love the Lord our God, and you may attain to a higher degree of eminence and happiness than Brother Bonaventure, with all his learning." After this he fell into an ecstacy, in which he continued motionless in sweet contemplation for the space of three hours.

In 1265, St. Bonaventure was nominated by Pope Clement IV. Archbishop of York. But the Saint besought his Holiness with tears, to discharge him from so heavy a burden. However, Gregory X., a prelate of extraordinary sanctity, directed to him a brief by which he was nominated Cardinal and Bishop of Albano, with a precept to accept that double charge without alleging any excuse, and immediately to repair to Rome. The holy Father met St. Bonaventure at Florence, and there ordained him bishop with his own hands. He then enjoined the Saint to prepare himself for speaking in the general council which he had called at Lyons for the re-union of the Greeks.

St. Bonaventure being seated on the Pope's right hand, first addressed the assembly, and, when the deputies of the Greeks were arrived, was told by the Pope to confer with them. They were delighted with his sweetness, convinced by his arguments, and acquiesced in every point. In thanksgiving, the Pope celebrated Mass on the feast of SS. Peter and Paul; the Gospel was chanted first in Latin, then in Greek. After this, St. Bonaventure preached on the Unity of Faith. Then the Creed was chanted, first in Latin, and afterwards in Greek; and, as a seal of the re-union of the two Churches, these words, "Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son," were thrice repeated. St. Bonaventure was taken ill after this session: nevertheless he assisted at the fourth, in which the high chancellor of Constantinople abjured

the schism. The next day his strength began entirely to fail him, so that he was no longer able to attend business. From that time he gave himself wholly up to his private devotions, and the constant serenity of his countenance was a token to all beholders of the peace and joy which possessed his soul in those most awful moments. The Pope himself gave him extreme unction; and the Saint, with his eyes constantly fixed on a crucifix, expired in great calmness on the 15th of June, in the year of our Lord 1274, of his age the fifty-third. The Pope and the whole council solemnized his funeral obsequies on the same day. Peter of Tarentaise, a Dominican friar, Cardinal, and Bishop of Ostia, afterwards Pope under the name of Innocent V., preached the funeral sermon, in which he said, "No one ever beheld him, who did not conceive a great esteem and affection for him; and even strangers, on hearing him speak, became desirous of following his counsel and instructions. For he was gentle, affable, humble, pleasing to all; compassionate, and prudent, chaste, and adorned with every virtue."

HINTS FOR THE USE OF THESE MEDITATIONS.

The frequent recurrence in St. Bonaventure's work of such words and phrases as "consider," "contemplate," "make yourself present," and the like, is enough to point out the manner in which it is meant to be used; *i. e.* as a guide and help towards *meditation*. Indeed, it was written expressly for a spiritual daughter, devoted to the religious life.*

Meditation is a word of wide extent, and a volume would not suffice for the consideration, in all its bearings, of the great subject which that word opens. In this place, all which is proposed is, to give a very few brief hints, gathered from the writings of approved spiritual authors, not upon meditation in general, but simply upon the use of this little book, which relates to one only of the many topics upon which that exercise is employed, the Life of our Blessed Lord; a topic, however, which, it may at the same time be observed, is especially recommended to beginners in the practice. Now, the great object in meditating upon the Life of our Lord is that upon which St. Bonaventure lays such stress, the acquirement, namely, of a certain holy "familiarity" (a word which, be it remembered, in a Catholic writer can never betoken even the most distant approach to irreverence) with the actions, character, and person of our Divine Redeemer.†

* See especially the concluding Chapter of the work.

† See St. Bonaventure's Preface, and the Chapter on the Opening of the Book in the Synagogue.

Now, meditation, upon whatever subject, being an act which brings us immediately into the Divine Presence, will be favoured by external helps of the same sort with those which each finds serviceable in the case of other kinds of private devotion. It is recommended, therefore, that Christians should practise the exercises at the *times* when the mind is in least danger of distraction; as, for instance, on rising in the morning, or before going to rest at night; in the *places* where surrounding objects are of a congenial, or at least not an uncongenial, character; in the *posture of body* most in keeping with a lowly, reverential, and devout frame of soul; and in union with certain definite *acts* (or deliberate efforts) of the mind, made with the view of obtaining more entire freedom from earthly trammels, and a more lively consciousness of the Divine Presence.

Beginners are strongly advised not to attempt too much at first; nor to disdain the constant and regular use of those helps, with which more practised spiritual students may occasionally dispense, *e. g.* the use of a book at the time of meditating, as a guide and support to the thoughts. They are likewise recommended to confine their meditations, at first, to a short period of time, and to increase this period by degrees. And again, to select and dwell upon those points to which their devotion most inclines them, or to which the associations of the particular season are the most favourable. With respect to the way of using a book of meditation, it is recommended that the devout student read it, passage by passage, and pause with the view of obtaining, as it were, something like a mental grasp of the subject before him; always, however, remembering that meditation, of whatever kind, is

an exercise with which the affections are engaged, rather than the understanding.

But, above all, beginners in meditation must be prepared for many great and disheartening drawbacks; coldness in affection, dryness of spirit, and involuntary distractions. Upon this subject, the following passage from that great spiritual master, St. Francis of Sales, will furnish both instruction and comfort. For great comfort it should be to beginners in the spiritual life, such as are even the more proficient among ourselves, to find infirmities which they are tempted to set down to some great and depressing peculiarity of their own, distinctly recognized in the records even of saintly experience, and provided for in the practical treatises of writers under an ecclesiastical system which offers the utmost advantages towards the higher exercises of the religious life.

"Should it happen, Philothea, that you feel no relish or comfort in meditation, I conjure you not to disturb yourself on that account, but to open the door of your heart to our Lord, confessing your unworthiness, and, beseeching Him to assist you, say to Him those words of Jacob, 'I will not let Thee go, O Lord, except Thou bless me;'* or those of the Canaanitish woman, 'Yea, Lord, I am a dog; but yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table.'† At other times, take up some spiritual book, and read it with attention till your spirit be awakened, and return to you. Or stir up your heart by some posture of exterior devotion, such as prostrating yourself on the ground, or crossing your hands before your breast, provided you

* Gen. xxxii. 26. † Matt. xv. 27.

be alone, or in some private place. But if you should, after all, receive no comfort, disturb not yourself, be the dryness ever so excessive, but continue to keep yourself in a devout posture. How many courtiers go a hundred times a year into the prince's presence-chamber, without hopes of speaking to him, but only to be seen by him, and to pay him their duty? So ought we, my dear Philothea, to come to holy prayer, purely and merely to pay our duty, and testify our fidelity to God; and should it please His Divine Majesty to speak, and entertain Himself with us by His holy inspirations and interior consolations, it would doubtless be to us a great honour, and most delightful pleasure; but should it not please Him to do us this favour, but leave us, without taking any more notice of us than if we were not in His presence, we must not therefore depart, but remain before His sovereign goodness with a devout and respectful carriage; and then observing our diligence, our patience, and perseverance, He will, when we again come before Him, favour us with His consolations, and make us experience the sweetness of holy prayer. Yet, if He should not do so, let us rest content, Philothea, that it is an exceeding great honour for us to come before Him, and be admitted into His presence."—*St. Francis of Sales' Introduction to a Devout Life.* Pt. ii. c. 9.

ON THE CONTEMPLATION OF THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST.

(*From St. Bonaventure's Life of Christ, c. 51. of the Original.*)

"THERE are two things," says St. Bernard, "which require to be purified in us,—the intellect and the affection; the intellect that it may know, the affection that it may will." And a little before; "The intellect, I say, is then depressed when it is occupied with a variety of thoughts, when it does not collect itself about one only meditation, taking its rise from that city which is at unity in itself."* And shortly afterwards he adds; "The affections, which in the corrupt body are influenced by divers passions, can never be tempered, much less healed, until the will seeks and tends to one thing alone." And again; "But it is Christ who enlightens the understanding, Christ who purifies the affections. For to this end did the Son of God come down, and work so many and so great wonders in the world, that He might with good reason withdraw our understanding from all worldly things, that we might always think, and never be able to think enough, of the wonders He has wrought. Most ample truly is the field which He has bequeathed for the range of our intellectual powers, most unfathomable the depths, and most irresistible the flow of those thoughts! For who is sufficient for the thought how He, the God of all the world, prevented us,

* Ps. cxxii. 3.

came to us, succoured us; and how His ineffable Majesty was willing to die that we might live; to be a slave that we might reign; to be an exile that we might be restored to our country; to stoop even to the most servile works, that He might place us over all His works."* Again; "Where shall we find truth amidst this darkness? where love in this bad world, which lieth wholly in wickedness?† Can we find any one who shall enlighten our understanding and enkindle our affection? We shall, if we turn to Christ, that the veil may be taken off our hearts."‡ § Again; "*A bundle of myrrh is my Well-beloved unto me; he shall lie betwixt my breasts.*|| And it was my care, brethren, from the beginning of my conversion, in consideration of the vast amount of merit which I knew I required, to bind together for myself this bundle, and to place it between my breasts, collected from all the distresses and bitternesses of my God. First, the necessities of His infancy, then the labours which He endured in preaching, His weariness in going about, His vigils in prayer, His temptations in fasting, His tears in compassionating our miseries, the snares laid for Him in talking; lastly, His perils from false brethren, taunts, spitting, buffets, mockings, revilings, nails, and the like, which the field of the Gospel has brought forth in the greatest abundance for the salvation of our race." And again; "To meditate on these things I said was wisdom; in these, I placed the perfection of righteousness; in these, the fulness of knowledge; in these, the riches of salvation; in these, the abundance of merit. From these I drank at times the waters of wholesome bitterness; at times again I drew the sweet unction of

* Serm. iii. in Ascens. Dom. † *Vid.* John, v. 19.
‡ 2 Cor. iii. 16. § Serm. v. de Asc. Dom. || Song of Sol. i. 13.

consolation. These lift me up in adversity, humble me in prosperity, and, as I journey along the royal road amidst the joys and sorrows of the present life, afford me a safe conduct, defending me against the evils that threaten me on either hand. These conciliate for me the Judge of the world, and picture Him to me as meek and humble, who is terrible to the mighty; they represent Him as not only placable, but even amiable towards me, who is inaccessible to princes, and terrible among the kings of the earth. Therefore is it that they are often in my mouth, as you know; ever in my heart, as is known to God; most familiar to my pen, as is evident; my highest wisdom and deepest philosophy, *to know Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*" * †

* 1 Cor. ii. 2. † Serm. 43, in Cantic.

MEDITATIONS

ON THE

LIFE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

ST. BONAVENTURE'S PREFACE.

Among the many praises bestowed on the holy Virgin, St. Cecilia, it is recorded of her, that she used to keep the Gospel of Christ continually enshrined in her breast: which seems to mean that she selected from the Gospel such passages of our Lord's Life as tended the most to enkindle her devotion. On these she meditated day and night, with a pure heart, and with such fervency of spirit, that she was not satisfied with a single perusal, but used to read the same parts many times over, as if to extract all their flavour, carefully lodging the sacred deposit in her heart. The like practice I recommend to you: for I look upon it to be the most necessary and profitable kind of spiritual exercise, and the one most capable of leading you on to Christian perfection. For in the holy Life of Jesus, not merely free as it is from every the minutest blemish, but even divinely perfect, you will find such materials as are nowhere else supplied towards arming the heart against the flattering, but short-lived, vanities of the world, against tribulations and adversities, against the temptations of spiritual enemies, and every kind of vice. Frequent and habitual meditations on His Life are ever the readiest means of leading the soul, as it were, into such a kind of familiarity with Him, and of possessing it with such a confidence and love of Him, as will insensibly cause it to hold all else cheap, and will moreover

fortify it with the knowledge both of what it should do, and of what it should avoid.

And first, that the frequent contemplation of the Life of our Lord Jesus strengthens the heart against the vain and fleeting pleasures of the world, sufficiently appears in blessed St. Cecilia, above mentioned, whose heart it so occupied, that no room was left for the entrance of vanities. Even amidst the seductions of pomp, and the charms of worldly music, combining to render the solemnity of her nuptials the more inviting to the senses, her heart, unmoved by all the flattering appearances around her, remained steadily fixed upon God, to whom she often recurred in the same strain: "O Lord! keep my body and heart unstained, that I be not confounded."

Secondly, it fortifies against tribulations and adversities, as is clear from the case of the Martyrs. St. Bernard thus argues: "Whence received the Martyrs their unshaken firmness, but from the sacred wounds of JESUS, in which their hearts and affections were wholly centred, and on which they lingered in continual meditation? While they beheld and felt their bodies torn and severed on the rack, their minds remained still cheerful and triumphant. And where can we then suppose the soul of each glorious sufferer to have been but in the wounds of CHRIST, ready open for its reception? Had it been centred in itself, dwelling upon the instruments of torture, it had been too sensible of the pangs inflicted to have endured the pain; it would have sunk under its agonies, and denied God."* Thus far St. Bernard. From the same Divine source, not Martyrs only,

* Serm. in Cantic. 61.

but even Confessors also, have derived their so great patience in tribulations and adversities. If you will read of the glorious St. Francis and the blessed St. Clare, you, will find how, under the severe pressure of afflictions, want, and infirmities, they came forth, not only patient, but joyful; and you may observe the same in all those of devout conversation, and from this cause, that, through pious meditation on the Life of Christ, their souls appear to have been, and to be, not in their own bodies, but in Him.

Thirdly, it is a powerful teacher in matters of practice, insomuch that neither enemies nor vices can rush in or deceive, where any is occupied in the continual meditation of a Life so perfect. For where else shall we find such an example, and such lessons, of exalted poverty, singular humility, profound wisdom, fervent prayer, obedience, meekness, patience, and all other virtues, as in the Life of this Lord of Virtues?

Accordingly, St. Bernard says, "He labours in vain in the pursuit of virtue who hopes to find it anywhere but in the Lord of Virtues, whose doctrine is the nursery of prudence, whose mercy is the work of righteousness, whose Life is the mirror of temperance, and whose Death the triumph of fortitude."* Whoever, therefore, follows this Divine pattern, can neither err, nor be deceived. For the soul, by frequently meditating on His virtues, is both quickened and enkindled to the imitation and pursuit of them, and at length becomes itself so clothed in virtue as to be able by its light to discern truth from falsehood; whence it has happened that many even illite-

* Serm. in Cantic. 22.

rate persons have become by the same means deeply versed in the most exalted mysteries of God. How otherwise, think you, than by a familiar conversation with his Divine Lord, and meditation on His Life, did St. Francis attain to such an eminent state of perfection, so clear a knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and that discernment by which he detected the arts of his spiritual enemies, and baffled the power of vice? Hence it was, that he became so lovingly absorbed in the Life of Christ as to render his own almost a picture of it. For he copied it as perfectly as he could, in the practice of all righteousness; and Christ, at length, crowning his love by the fulfilment of his wishes, he became wholly transformed into his Saviour, by receiving the impression of His sacred wounds. You see, then, to how exalted a state the soul is led by meditating on the Life of Christ; and yet this is but, as it were, the foundation on which the soul rises to higher degrees of contemplation. For the unction, which is found therein, purifies by degrees and elevates the soul, and instructs it in all Divine knowledge. This, however, tends not immediately to our present purpose.

And now, gentle reader, I propose introducing you, in some measure, to the meditations themselves on the blessed Life of Christ, though I could wish you a more experienced and learned guide; for I am myself very unequal to so great a task. But, as I conceive it to be more for your advantage that I should say something, however unworthily, than that I should remain altogether silent, I shall endeavour to make the best use I can of my slender ability, by discoursing in a familiar, though plain and unpolished style; that you may the more

easily comprehend the matter here treated of, and study, by means of it, not so much to please your ears as to improve your heart.

It is not beauty of language, but the study of the Life of Jesus, to which I ask your attention. And this we are led to understand from what St. Jerome teaches us, who says, "Plain language reaches the heart, whilst finished speeches merely fill and please the ears." Still I am in hopes that my poor ability will give some assistance to your unformed thoughts. But I hope still more, that if you are but willing to exercise yourself herein by diligent meditation, the Lord Himself, of whose Life we are speaking, will become your Master and Instructor. You are not, however, to imagine that we can meditate on everything which He either said or did, or that everything has been recorded. Nevertheless, to make the better impression on your mind, I shall relate the circumstances which I describe just as if they had actually happened, that is, in the manner in which they may be conceived to have happened, according to such devout imaginations as the mind is capable of forming. For it is ever allowable, in the study of Holy Scripture, to contemplate, expound, and understand in different points of view, as we conceive most expedient; provided always that there be nothing contrary to the truth of the facts of His Life, to His righteous doctrine, nor to faith and good works. Whenever, then, you shall find me saying, Thus spake, or thus acted, our Lord Jesus, or whatever else is introduced to the same effect; if it cannot be proved by Scripture, *you are to take it no otherwise than as the effect of a devout meditation:* that is, in other words, take it as if I said, Meditate or consider that thus spake or acted

our Lord Jesus; and so in all similar cases. But, if you are desirous of reaping fruit from this work, you must make yourself as completely *present* at every thing here related to have been said or done by our Lord Jesus, *as if you heard it with your own ears, and saw it with your own eyes;* and that with earnest attention and the devotion of your whole soul, taking delight in it, and dwelling at your leisure upon it, and laying aside, for the time, all other occupations and engagements. In short, beloved reader, I entreat you to take in good part the pains I have here been at for the honour and praise of our Lord Jesus, and for your spiritual profit as well as my own; and to endeavour, with all the alacrity, devotion, and diligence of which you are master, to carry the same into practice.

THE

LIFE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

THE

LIFE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

CHAPTER I.

THE INCARNATION OF OUR LORD.

When the fulness of time was now come, the Ever-blessed Trinity having decreed to redeem mankind by the Incarnation of the Word, it pleased Almighty God to summon to Him the Archangel Gabriel, and send him to Nazareth, *to a Virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, and the Virgin's name was Mary.** Gabriel, with a calm and beaming countenance, reverently and devoutly prostrate before the Throne of God, listens to the gracious message, and accepts the embassy. Then, rising on the wings of joy, he quits the heavenly courts, and is instantly present, in human shape, before the Virgin Mary, whom he discovers in the innermost retreat of her lowly dwelling. Yet not so rapid was his flight, but that the Blessed Trinity, preventing their ambassador, was in the dwelling before him.

For you must know, that although the Person of the Son alone was made Man, yet the Whole Blessed Trinity took part in His Incarnation, the Father and the Holy Ghost co-operating with the Son in this august mystery. Here then be specially attentive, and try to embrace all

* Luke, i. 27.

that passes, as if present at the sacred scene. O what scope may not be afforded for your meditation in that lowly dwelling, where such Personages are assembled, and such unutterable Mysteries accomplished! For though the Holy Trinity be undoubtedly always everywhere present, yet, in this place, on this occasion, you must conceive It present in a more especial way, by reason of the unspeakable work then and there effected. The Angel Gabriel, then, this faithful proxy of the heavenly Bridegroom, having come into the presence of the blessed Virgin, thus began his message: "Hail, full of grace! the Lord is with thee: Blessed art thou among women." To which, not a little disturbed, she made no answer. Her disturbance, however, proceeded not from any guilty confusion within her; nor could it be occasioned by the sight of the Angel, for to such sights she was well accustomed. But, in the words of the Evangelist, "*She was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be,*" * so unlike his usual manner of greeting her. Nor could the lowly Virgin be otherwise than disturbed at the threefold praise contained in this salutation. To hear herself commended because full of grace, because the Lord was with her, and she blessed above all women, was more than one so rich in humility could bear without a blush of emotion. Her discomposure then was wholly the effect of a virtuous and becoming bashfulness. Moreover, she was not without fear of giving too easy credence to the tidings. Not that she mistrusted in the least the Angel's word; but it is ever the manner of the truly humble rather to dwell upon their failings than to weigh their merits, and thus continually to advance towards perfection by taking

* Luke, v. 29.

little account of their high attainments in holiness, and greatly magnifying their least defects. Thus, as became a prudent, fearful, and modest virgin, our blessed Lady remained silent; for what could she find to answer? Learn from her example the study and practice of silence; for a virtue it is of great price, and serviceable withal. Not till she had heard the Angel twice deliver his wondrous message, could she prevail on herself to make any answer; so odious a thing in a virgin is talkativeness. Then the Angel, understanding the reason of her trouble, said, *Fear not, Mary.** "Be not abashed by the praises I utter; they are but truth: for thou art not only full of grace thyself, but art to be the means of restoring all mankind to the grace of God, which they have lost. For behold, thou shalt conceive, and bring forth the Son of the Highest. He, who has chosen thee to be His Mother, shall save all who put their trust in Him." Then the blessed Virgin, waiving the subject of her praises, was desirous of knowing how all this could come to pass, without the loss of her virgin purity. She, therefore, inquired of the Angel the manner of the Conception. *How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?* "I have dedicated myself to my Lord by a vow of perpetual virginity."—"It shall be done (replied the Angel) by the operation of the Holy Ghost, who, in an unspeakable manner, shall overshadow thee, so that by His power thou shalt conceive, without prejudice to thy virgin purity: and therefore shall thy Son be called the Son of God. For with Him nothing is impossible. In proof of which, know that, by the same power of God, *thy cousin Elizabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.*"†

* Luke, v. 30. † Ib. v. 36.

Here put yourself in the Presence of God, and contemplate how the Blessed Trinity, awaiting the answer and consent of this beloved daughter, was delighted to behold her chaste gravity of demeanour, and her lowly expressions. With what wisdom and studious care does the Angel order his every word, so as to prevail with her; with what calm and reverent sweetness does he bend before her, his awful mistress, faithfully acquitting himself of his commission, and attentively marking her words, that he may reply to them in a manner befitting her dignity, his own high office, and the will of the Almighty in this wonderful and glorious work! And lastly, with what a becoming deportment of fearfulness and humility, mixed with graceful bashfulness of look, does she receive the sudden and astounding message of the Angel, without being elated at it, or bestowing one thought upon herself! And when she hears wondrous things of herself, and such as were never said to any other mortal, she ascribes all to Divine Grace.

Learn, then, modesty and lowliness from her example, for without these virginity itself is of little avail.

The blessed Virgin, after hearing the last-mentioned words of the Angel, was full of joy, and gave her consent. With profound devotion she fell on her knees, and, clasping her hands, said; *Behold the handmaid of the Lord: Be it unto me according to thy word.** At the same instant, the Son of God passed entire into the Virgin's womb, took flesh of her, and still remained entire in the bosom of His Father. Now, you may piously imagine, how the Son of God, on undertaking this laborious mission of obedience, inclined and recommended Himself to the Father, and that in the same instant

* Luke v. 38.

His soul was created and infused into the womb of His Mother; perfect Man, according to all the lineaments of the body, but very minute; so that, though He afterwards grew in the womb, as naturally as other children, yet His soul was infused, and His body perfectly formed, from the first. He was also perfect God as well as perfect Man, and equally wise and powerful as He is now. But to return to the Angel Gabriel. In order to accompany the blessed Virgin in her devotions, he knelt awhile, and then rising, and taking humble and reverential leave of her, vanished out of sight, and returned to his country, where he related what had happened, and caused there new joy and festivity, and the highest jubilee. Our Lady, all in raptures, and more than usually enkindled with the love of God, began to be sensible of her august privilege. Wherefore, again throwing herself upon her knees, she returned God thanks for so great a favour, and with most humble and fervent supplication besought Him to instruct her how to act her part towards her Son, without failure or imperfection.

Meditate then on the greatness of this day's solemnity. Rejoice in your heart, and keep the feast with gladness. A day it is, unheard of since the beginning of time. A day devoted to the honour of God the Father, who celebrates the nuptials of His Son, espoused to human nature, which He has inseparably united to Himself. A day sacred to the wedding of the Divine Son, and to His entrance into the virginal womb, through which He is to pass into the world. A day sacred to the Holy Ghost, by whose wonderful co-operation the work of the Incarnation was effected; and whose singular kindness and love to mankind began this day to appear.* A day of glory

* *Vide* Titus, iii. 4.

to our blessed Lady, as that on which she was acknowledged and adopted by the Father for a Daughter; by the Son for a Mother; by the Holy Ghost for a Spouse. A day of rejoicing to the whole company of Heaven, on account of the work of their reparation,* which dated from it; but more especially to mankind, since on this began their salvation and redemption; for on this day properly was the whole nature of man exalted and deified. On this day the Son submitted to the new command of His Father in the work of our salvation. On this day, coming forth from the highest heavens, *He rejoiced as a giant to run His course,*† and entered into the virginal garden of His Mother's womb. On this day, He was made one of us, and, becoming our Brother, began to dwell among us. On this day, the true Light descended from heaven to lighten our darkness, and scatter the clouds of our ignorance. On this day, the Living Bread, which gives life to the world, was truly perfected in the sacred tabernacle of the Virgin's womb, and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. On this day, lastly, the long-continued cries of the holy patriarchs and prophets were heard, and their fervent desires fully accomplished. They had cried aloud, with inexpressible earnestness, saying, *Send forth, O Lord, the Lamb, the ruler of the earth.*‡ *Drop dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down the Righteous One.*§ *O that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down.*‖ *Bow Thy heavens, O Lord, and come down.*¶ *Cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.*** These words, with innumerable others like them, are found in holy writ. Thus did they anxiously expect this blessed day. This day was the

* *i. e.* By the Saints taken to fill the places of the reprobate Angels.

† Ps. xix. 5.

‡ *Vid.* Is. xvi. 1.

§ Is. xlv. 8.

‖ Is. lxiv. 1.

¶ Ps. cxliv. 5.

** Ps. lxxx. 3.

first beginning and foundation of all joyful solemnities, and is the only true source of all our real happiness. For though hitherto Almighty God has been justly wroth against mankind, for the transgression of their first parents, yet from this time His anger against them shall cease on beholding His Only Son made Man for their redemption. Hence is this day so justly called "the fulness of time." You see, therefore, the wonderful greatness of this most solemn Mystery, where all is profitable and sweet, all is pleasing and desirable; in a word, where all is so unutterably sacred, that it should be entered upon with all devotion, solemnized with all joy, and treated with profoundest veneration. Meditate, then, on these points—make them all your pleasure—and the Lord will reward you with true joy, and give you, perchance, a still deeper insight into spiritual wonders.

CHAPTER II.

OUR BLESSED LADY VISITS HER COUSIN ST. ELIZABETH, IN WHOSE HOUSE THE "MAGNIFICAT" AND "BENEDICTUS" ARE COMPOSED.

After this, our Lady, calling to mind the words which the Angel had spoken concerning her cousin Elizabeth, resolved to visit her; and this with the view not merely of congratulating her, but of offering to assist her. Wherefore, in company with Joseph, her spouse, she set out on her journey from the little city of Nazareth towards her cousin's house, distant from Jerusalem fourteen or fifteen miles, or thereabouts [and therefore from Nazareth almost seventy]. Neither the length of the journey, nor the roughness of the road, could deter her from her pious re-

solution; but she went *with haste*,* not wishing to appear long in public. Nor was she, like other women in her condition, in the least encumbered by the Divine Infant she bore within her; for the Lord Jesus was no burden to His Mother. And now, do you go in mind along with this blessed couple. Behold this queenly Virgin, how, in company with her spouse alone, she proceeds on her journey; not upon a stately horse, but on foot; not escorted by a band of soldiers or barons, nor surrounded by a glittering bevy of courtly ladies. Poverty, humility, modesty, with every graceful virtue, these are all her train. The Lord of Hosts, indeed, is with her, attended by all His glorious court; but the vain pomp and splendour of the world are not there. Come at length to her journey's end, she enters the house of Zacharias, and finding there her cousin Elizabeth, salutes her with the words, "Hail, sister Elizabeth." Elizabeth, enkindled by the Holy Ghost with transports of joy, immediately rises, and tenderly embracing her, cries aloud: "*Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?*"* No sooner had the Virgin saluted her, than both child and mother were filled with the Holy Ghost. Nor is the mother inspired before her son; but he, being first filled himself, fills his parent also; not operating anything new within her, but rather meriting that something divine should be wrought within her soul by the operation of the Holy Ghost, inasmuch as the grace of the Holy Spirit was shed abroad more abundantly within him, and he first became sensible of His blessed power. Thus, while she outwardly perceived the presence of Mary, he inwardly was affected by the approach of his Lord, and

* Luke, i. 39. † Ib. i. 24.

thus he leapt for joy, while she prophesied. Mary then replied to Elizabeth in these words, "*My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour*," with the rest of that sweet canticle of praise. They then proceeded to sit down; whereupon our Lady, greatest in the virtue of humility, would have seated herself in the lowest place, at the feet of Elizabeth; but she rising instantly, as not suffering such a thing, lifted her up; and at length, both modestly yielding to each other, they seated themselves together, side by side. Then succeeded mutual inquiries concerning the mysteries of which each had been the subject, and this was a topic of happy narrative, and joint thanksgiving to God for their several privileges. And so they passed a long and joyous day. Our blessed Lady continued with Elizabeth for about three months, helping and serving her as far as she was able, with all devotion, humility, and veneration, as if quite forgetting that she was the chosen Mother of God. O what a heavenly dwelling! what blessed apartments! What an immaculate bed was that which contained the Mothers of such Infants: Mary and Elizabeth, Jesus and John! And there too were their august and venerable partners, Joseph and Zacharias.

When Elizabeth's full time was come, she was happily delivered of a son, which our Lady received in her arms, and swaddled with becoming care. The infant, as if conscious of the majesty of his nurse, fixed his eyes stedfastly on her, so taken with her beauty, that, when she delivered him again to his mother, he still looked towards her as if he could take delight in none but her; while she, on the other hand, continued graciously playing with him, embracing him, and cherishing him with her heavenly lips. What excess of honour was this for St. John! What pure mortal, besides himself, was ever blessed with

such a nurse! Yet this is not the only great privilege he enjoyed. Many others might be named, were they not foreign to our present purpose.

On the eighth day the child was circumcised, and called John. Then was the mouth of Zacharias opened, and he prophesied, saying, "*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel*," and the rest. Thus were the *Magnificat* and *Benedictus*, those two canticles of matchless beauty, composed in this house. In the mean time, while the latter was singing, our blessed Lady, virgin-like, to avoid being gazed on by the men who were present, on account of the ceremony, kept apart in a secret recess of the chamber, where, unseen, she could hear what passed, and there devoutly listened to the prophecies uttered concerning her Divine Son: carefully and wisely depositing the whole in her heart. At length, taking leave of Elizabeth and Zacharias, and giving her blessing to John, she returns to her humble dwelling at Nazareth. Here again, contemplate her poverty in another shape. She returns home: but to what a home? To a home unprovided with meat or drink: to a home wanting in the common necessaries of life. But this were little, had she either estate or money, or other means to procure her a cheerful residence there. But to these she is a stranger. She has remained now three months with her relations, probably in no mean circumstances: but now she has to return to her former state of poverty, and to gain a narrow subsistence with her own hands. Do you feel for her, and learn by her example to love poverty!

CHAPTER III.

HOW JOSEPH THOUGHT OF DISMISSING MARY; AND HOW GOD SUFFERS HIS BELOVED TO BE AFFLICTED.

When our blessed Lady and her spouse had been some time at home, and Jesus had visibly grown in His Mother's womb, St. Joseph could not but perceive the pregnancy of this heavenly parent, which was a subject of exceeding grief to him.

Attend well to this; for hence you will be able to learn many wonderful mysteries. If it should seem strange to you that our Lord would have His Mother espoused, though she was to remain always a virgin, there are three very natural reasons to be assigned. First, that her pregnancy might not subject her to infamy. Secondly, that the care and company of a man might guard her from insults. Thirdly, that the mystery of the birth of the Son of God might be hidden from the devil.

Joseph frequently observed his spouse, but never without grief and confusion; nor could he help showing his concern by the dismay of his countenance; often would he turn his eyes away from her as from a criminal, whom he suspected of adultery. You see how God permits those whom He loves to be afflicted in this life, and how He prepares them by trials for a crown of glory.

His design, then, was to put her away privily. Here it may be truly said, that his praise is in the Gospel: it is there said, that *he was a just man;** and great in-

* Matt. i. 19.

deed does his virtue appear on this occasion. For though, commonly speaking, the greatest provocation a man has to shame, grief, and frenzy, is the infidelity of his wife; yet he knew so well how to moderate his passion by virtue, that he would not so much as accuse a wife whom he thought guilty; but chose patiently to stifle the injury, and, not avenging himself, but moved with righteous pity, and wishing to be merciful, he was minded to put her away privily.

Nor was our blessed Lady without her share of tribulation: she could not but observe his emotion; and could not but be disturbed at it herself. Nevertheless, she humbly kept peace, and concealed the Gift of God, rather choosing to be reputed a sinner, than to divulge the sacramental mystery, and to say that of herself, which might wear the appearance of vainglory. All her recourse was to the Lord, whom she besought, that He would vouchsafe to apply a remedy Himself, and to take away this affliction from herself and her spouse. Hence gather what inexpressible grief and anxiety these two blessed persons were in! But the same Lord, who wisely permitted them to be tried, mercifully relieved them both in time of need, sending an Angel to Joseph in a dream, to inform him that his spouse had conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, and that he might remain with her in all confidence and joy. Thus, their disquiet ceasing, inexpressible comfort was restored to their hearts. And the same would happen to us, if we knew how to arm ourselves with patience in the day of trial; for after a tempest God ever sends a calm. Nor ought we in the least to doubt it; for He is too tender of His elect to suffer them to undergo the least tribulation which does not tend to their advantage.

St. Joseph, after this, inquired into the particulars of

the miraculous Conception, which the lowly Virgin faithfully related to him: and he remained thenceforward with his blessed spouse in a state of the utmost joy and contentment. No words can tell with how chaste a love he cherished her, and how faithfully he guarded her. Our Lady was affected towards him with a like tenderness, and both jointly rejoiced in their common poverty.

In the mean time, Jesus remained enclosed in His Mother's womb, like other children, during the space of nine months, patiently and benignly waiting the appointed time. Reflect, then, and compassionate Him who, for your sake, reduced Himself to so abject a state of humiliation. How carefully, then, ought we to try and secure to ourselves the possession of this virtue of humility, and how little does it become us to follow our ambition, and to swell with the vain desire of reputation, when the Lord of Majesty condescended to stoop to so humble a state! Never can we make a sufficient return to Him for this second proof He gives us, in this tedious imprisonment, of the excess of His love for us. At least, let us make Him a cordial acknowledgment of it, and, with the utmost devotion of our hearts, give Him thanks for having chosen us from among the rest of mankind, to make Him the slender return of withdrawing from the vanities of the world, to attend to His service. It is true, we owe it wholly to the gift of His divine grace, not to any merit of ours, that we are able to live to Him; and yet He is pleased to look upon such service as highly acceptable and praiseworthy. Nor ought holy solitude to be deemed a punishment, but a safeguard. For if we be safe on God's holy hill of peace, the poisoned darts, or tempestuous waves, of this wicked world may assault, but cannot reach us, except we rashly expose ourselves to their power. Let us, then, with all our might, and with the

greatest purity of heart, avail ourselves of the blessings of holy seclusion, trying to keep our thoughts disengaged as far as possible from the fleeting interests of the world. For it will be of little use for the body to be separated from the world, if the mind or heart be enslaved to it.

Learn, likewise, to suffer with our Lord Jesus, who suffered for you from the moment of His Conception to that of His Death. For He knew that His Father, whom He infinitely loved, was, and would be, dishonoured by sinners, and put aside for the veriest idols; and He saw, with unspeakable grief and pity, the souls which had been created after His own likeness, and which He tenderly loved, plunge themselves far and wide into irretrievable ruin. And this His anguish of spirit was so much more acute than His bodily sufferings, as it was the cause of His undertaking them. What a rich and plentiful feast of spiritual food is here set before you for contemplation! Taste it then, and, if you wish to relish its sweetness, linger at it, and return to it again and again.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

The term then of nine months being nearly expired, a decree went forth from the Emperor, that all the world should be taxed, each in his own city. Joseph, wishing to go into his city, Bethlehem, and knowing that his wife's time of delivery was drawing on, resolved upon taking her along with him. Here, a second time, our blessed Lady undertakes a wearisome journey; the town of Bethlehem being within five or six miles of

Jerusalem and seventy from Nazareth. All they took with them was an ox and an ass, with which they travelled like poor dealers in cattle. When they arrived at Bethlehem, being poor people, and a great multitude flocking thither for the same purpose, they found no accommodation. Here compassionate this young and delicate Virgin. Consider her at the age of fifteen, overcome with the fatigues of a long journey, confused, terrified, and abashed, amidst a crowded populace: she seeks, to no purpose, a place of rest; and being everywhere rudely refused admittance for herself and her spouse, is at last reduced to seek a shelter in a homely shed, the usual refuge of persons surprised by sudden storms of rain. In this place, we may suppose that St. Joseph, who was by profession a carpenter, might probably have made a kind of partition, or small enclosure for the little party. And now let me earnestly entreat you to attend diligently to all which I am going to relate; the rather, because I had it from a devout and holy man of our Order, of undoubted credit, to whom I believe it to have been supernaturally imparted.

When the expected hour of the birth of the Son of God was come, on Sunday, towards midnight, the holy Virgin, rising from her seat, went and rested herself against a pillar she found there: Joseph, in the mean time, sate pensive and sorrowful; perhaps, because he could not prepare the necessary accommodation for her. But at length he too arose, and, taking what hay he could find in the manger, diligently spread it at our Lady's feet, and then retired to another part of the building. Then the Son of the Eternal God, coming forth from His Mother's womb, was, without hurt or pain to her, transferred in an instant from thence to the humble bed of hay which was prepared for Him at her feet. His holy

Mother, hastily stooping down, took Him up in her arms, and tenderly embracing Him, laid Him in her lap; then, through instinct of the Holy Ghost, she began to bathe Him in her sacred milk, with which she was most amply supplied from heaven; this done, she took the veil off her head, and wrapping Him in it, carefully laid Him in the manger. Here the ox and the ass, kneeling down, and laying their heads over the manger, gently breathed upon Him, as if endowed with reason, and sensible, that through the inclemency of the season, and His poor attire, the blessed Infant stood in need of their assistance to warm and cherish Him. Then the holy Virgin, throwing herself on her knees, adored Him, and returning thanks to God, said: "My Lord and heavenly Father, I give Thee most hearty thanks, that Thou hast vouchsafed of Thy bounty to give me Thine Only Son; and I praise and worship Thee, O Eternal God, together with Thee, O Son of the Living God, and mine."

Joseph likewise worshipped Him at the same time; after which he stripped the ass of his saddle, and separating the pillion from it, placed it near the manger for the blessed Virgin to sit on; but she, seating herself with her face towards the manger, made use of that homely cushion only for support. In this posture our Lady remained some time immoveable, gazing on the manger, her looks and affections all absorbed in her dearest Son.

You have here, Christian reader, been present at the sacred birth of the Son of God, and beheld the happy delivery of His blessed Mother, and may have discovered in both these mysteries the true practice of strict poverty, how it cheerfully submits to the want even of necessaries. This most exalted virtue our Lord first brought out in its true lustre. This is that pearl of the Gospel, to ob-

tain which we must sell all we have. This is the first foundation of the whole spiritual building. For the soul which is clogged with the weight of earthly goods cannot mount up to God. On this point St. Francis says: "You are to know, brethren, that poverty is the spiritual road to salvation; the sap, as it were, of humility, and the root of all perfection, whose fruit is manifold, but hidden. It ought then to be matter of great shame to us, that, instead of trying with all our strength to embrace it, we load ourselves with things unnecessary, and this when the Lord of the universe, and the blessed Virgin, His Mother, were the strictest and most careful observers of it." Hence St. Bernard says, "This kind of treasure was so common on earth that men were led to hold it cheap. Then the Son of God, having a desire towards it, came down from heaven, to choose it for Himself, and make it precious to us, by the value He set upon it. Adorn thy heart then, as a worthy sanctuary for thy heavenly Spouse, with the virtues of humility and poverty. These are the swaddling clothes in which He delights, and in these He is well pleased, as the blessed Mary testifies, to be wrapped, as though they were mantles of the richest brocades. Adorn thy soul with them, and sacrifice the abominations of the Egyptians to thy God." * Thus far St. Bernard. And again, in his Sermon on the Nativity, beginning; "Blessed be the God and Father," &c. he says: "Almighty God at length comforts His people. Would you know, who are His people? Hear, then, the man according to God's own heart: *The poor committeth himself unto Thee.*† And as Christ adds in the Gospel: *Woe unto you that are rich; for ye have received your consolation.*‡ How can they expect from Him any comfort, who

* Serm. 1, in Vigil. Nat. Dom. † Psalm, x. 16. ‡ Luke, vi. 24.

have placed their comfort elsewhere? the tender infancy of Jesus Christ is no comfort to the talkative; His tears are no comfort to those who are inclined to immoderate laughter and vain mirth. They whose glory it is to shine in gay apparel, receive no comfort from the poverty and meanness of His attire; nor are His humble shed, and homely manger, any comfort to those who love the chief seats in the synagogue. The joyful tidings of Light were first carried to poor shepherds, keeping watch over their flocks, and it was said that unto them a Saviour was born; that is, unto the poor, the industrious, and those who labour; not unto you, O rich, who have here your consolation and your empire."*

In this same Nativity of the Son of God, we may likewise contemplate a most profound humility both in the Mother and her blessed Son. They disdained not a shed for their dwelling, a truss of hay for their bed, brute cattle for their companions; and all else around them was of a like mean description. This virtue both our Lord and His Mother observed in the greatest perfection in all their actions, and they have commended it to us. Let us strive then, with all our might, to embrace it; for without it there is no salvation. Not one of all our actions can please God, if joined with pride. For, according to St. Augustine, it was pride that changed Angels into devils, it is humility which makes men as Angels. And St. Bernard says: "What manner of man, think you, ought he to be, whose lot it is to fill the place of a reprobate Angel? Pride once invaded that heavenly Kingdom, shook its walls, and in no small measure even undermined them. What then follows, but that so poisonous a vice must be a chief abomination in that glorious

* Serm. 5, in Nat. Dom.

commonwealth? Be sure, brethren, that He who spared not the Angels for their pride, will not spare mankind. He is never inconsistent with Himself."*

Lastly, you may observe in this Divine Child and His blessed Mother, but especially in the Infant Jesus, a more than common sorrowfulness of spirit. On which St. Bernard again says: "The Son of God at His birth, when it was in His power to choose whatever time He pleased, made choice of that time which was most afflictive; especially to a tender infant, the son of a poor mother, who had scarcely clothes to cover Him, and no better cradle than a manger in which to lay Him: and notwithstanding the great need there was for them, we hear nothing of warm furs, or downy mantles."† And again: "Christ, who cannot be mistaken, chose what was most painful to the flesh. This, then, is best, and most profitable, and rather to be preferred; and whoever teaches any other doctrine, or advises any other course, ought to be shunned as an impostor." ‡ And again: "He was a long time before foretold by the prophet Isaiah, as a Child *who should know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.* § It follows, therefore, that the pleasures of the flesh are an evil, and affliction a good; since that Wise Child, the Infant Word in human flesh, made choice of the latter, in preference to the former."‖ Thus far St. Bernard. Go thou and do likewise; yet discreetly, so as not to exceed your power. Of these virtues we may speak in another place; now, let us return to the scene of the Nativity.

The Son of God being now born, a multitude of the heavenly host, which was assisting at the solemnity, fell

* Serm. 2, pro Dom. 1, Nov. † Serm. 3, de Nat. Dom.
‡ Ibid. § Isaiah, vii. 16. ‖ Serm. 3, de Nat. Dom.

down and worshipped their God: and forthwith hastened to the shepherds, who were about a mile from Bethlehem, to announce to them the birth of our Lord Jesus, and the place where it happened. Thence, with joyful acclamations, singing canticles of praise and glory, they ascend to the courts of heaven, carrying the tidings to their fellow-citizens above. Whereupon, the whole company of blessed spirits, in raptures of joy, celebrated the sacred Mystery with the utmost pomp: and due thanks being paid to the Almighty Majesty of God the Father, they all successively, according to the different orders of their heavenly hierarchy, descend to behold the lovely and gracious countenance of their Lord God; and adoring Him with all reverence, not without due respect to the blessed Virgin His Mother, they filled the air with sweet and melodious canticles of praise and thanksgiving to His Divine Majesty. For what one among them, having heard the joyful tidings, could have remained in heaven, or have forborne to visit his Lord thus humbled, thus reduced to so low a state on earth? None of them could be capable of arrogance like this. And, therefore, the Apostle says: *When He bringeth in the First-begotten into the world, He saith: and let all the Angels of God worship Him.** Whatever be the truth on this subject, it is one on which I find it especially sweet to meditate.

Next came the shepherds, and worshipped Him, relating what they had heard from the Angels. Meanwhile His most prudent Mother kept in her heart a faithful record of all things that were said of Him. Then they returned on their way with joy. And thou too, O Christian loiterer! throw thyself on thy knees, though late, and worship the Lord thy God, reverencing also, as

* Hebrews, i. 6.

is meet, His holy Mother, and not forgetting to salute the holy and venerable Joseph. Then in spirit tenderly kiss the feet of the Infant Jesus, as He lies stretched on the bed of hay; and ask His Mother to let you take Him into your arms; then take Him and clasp Him with tender affection, attentively muse on the sweetness of His sacred features, and with deepest awe salute Him, and delight yourself in Him with a good heart. This may you do, though a sinner, because He came into the world to save sinners, and after having for a time conversed among them with all humility and meekness, at length He gave Himself to be their Food. His Divine bounty therefore will patiently suffer you to handle Him as often as your affection prompts you, and He will set down your desire not to presumption but to love. Yet ever do this with reverence and godly fear, for He is the Holy of Holies. When you have contemplated Him sufficiently, restore Him to His Mother, and consider well how assiduously, carefully, and prudently she acquits herself of her charge, suckles Him, and performs every office of parental kindness towards Him. Remember to delight yourself in all these dutiful ministrations, meditate on each of them, and be you, with the blessed Mother, a servant of your Lord; often dwelling in thought upon that Divine Countenance, which the Angels themselves desire to behold; but always, I repeat, with reverence and fear, that so you meet not with a repulse; for you ought to esteem yourself unworthy the conversation of so august and heavenly a company.

It might afford us new matter of spiritual joy, were we to contemplate the greatness of this day's solemnity. On this day was born CHRIST; and, therefore, this is truly the Birth-day of the Eternal King of heaven, the SON of the Living GOD. This day, *Unto us a Child is*

*born, unto us a Son is given.** This day the Sun of Righteousness, which before was under a cloud, shed forth the bright beams of His mercy and grace upon the world. This day the Holy Ghost, Head of the chosen people of God's Church, came forth as a bridegroom out of His chamber. This day He that was fairer than the children of men, unveiled His lovely and desirable countenance. This day first was heard that angelic hymn, "*Gloria in excelsis Deo.*" This day came "peace on earth," according to the words of the same Divine hymn. This day, as the Church chants throughout the whole world, "the heavens drop honey, and the Angels sing on earth."* This day, the kindness and love of God our Saviour first appeared toward men.† This day God was first worshipped in the likeness of sinful flesh. This day were fulfilled those two wonderful mysteries passing all understanding, and to be reached only by faith, to wit, God born, and a Virgin a Mother. This day a multitude of other miracles was displayed. In a word, on this day all that has been said of the Incarnation, shone forth in its true lustre. For whatever was begun before, was not completed nor manifested till now: so that it may not be improper to combine passages which speak of different times, and make them the subject of a common meditation. Not without great reason then, you see, is this day a day of universal joy and gladness.

* Isaiah, ix. 6.

† These words enter into the Responsories and Antiphons of the Office of the Nativity in the Breviary.

‡ Tit. iii. 4.

CHAPTER V.

THE CIRCUMCISION AND TEARS OF THE INFANT JESUS.

Upon the eighth day, the blessed Infant was circumcised. Two great mysteries were wrought on this day. The first, that the Holy Name, through which alone salvation is to be obtained, was then made manifest to the world; that Name which had been given Him by His heavenly Father from all eternity, and by the holy Angel before He was conceived. And they called His name Jesus; that is, a Saviour. *Which Name is above every name.** *For,* as the Apostle Peter says, *there is none other name under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*† The second mystery is, that on this day our Lord Jesus began to shed His most precious Blood for our sakes. So early did He begin to suffer for us, that He who knew no sin undertook this day to endure the pain of it for us. Here let tenderness move you to suffer with Him: try to shed at least some few tears with Him, who on this day shed many for you. For though upon such solemn days we ought greatly to rejoice at our salvation purchased by the mysteries they commemorate; yet ought we likewise to conceive an inward sorrow and compassion, on beholding His anguish, by whom they were graciously wrought. We have already seen how many were the afflictions He suffered, together with the great poverty, privation, and distress He underwent at the time of His sacred birth. But among other things was this, which has not hitherto been mentioned.

* Phil. ii. 9. † Acts, iv. 12.

His blessed Mother, when she had laid Him in the manger, having no pillow with which to raise His head, made use for that purpose of a stone, which it is not unlikely she might have covered with hay. This I had from a devout brother, who saw it in spirit; and to this day the same stone appears, a visible memorial of the fact. A cushion or a pillow, we may piously imagine, would much rather have been her choice, had she possessed one; but, having nothing more proper to answer the end, to the great affliction of her tender heart, she was compelled to make use of a stone.

We have said before, that on this day He began to shed His sacred Blood for us, and that, indeed, in a most severe manner; by the mangling of His tender flesh. Ought we not, then, to suffer for, and with, Him? Truly ought we, and not to forget the sorrows of His blessed Mother. Piteously did the Holy Jesus cry to-day at the pain which He felt in His sacred flesh; for true flesh He had, and sensible of smart, like that of any mere mortal. And can we reasonably imagine, then, that His holy Mother, when she saw her Beloved in tears, could refrain from them? No, we may well suppose, that she wept also, on seeing Him cry; and that her Son, as He lay stretched on her lap, waved His little hands towards her face, as if beseeching her not to cry, for He could not bear to see her in tears, loving her as He did so tenderly. And in turn His blessed Mother, moved to her inmost soul at the sight of the pain and tears of her Son, endeavoured with signs and words to comfort Him. "My Son," she might say, "if Thou wouldest have me dry my tears, cease Thyself to weep. For how, while I see Thine, can I forbid my own to flow?" And then, in pity to His Mother, the Babe would moderate His sobs; while she would wipe His sacred eyes and her own, and

press her face to His, and give Him nourishment at her pure virgin breast, and solace Him as well as she could. And thus did she whenever He cried, which perchance He did, as children are apt, full often, to shew the misery of our nature, which He had truly taken upon Him, and to conceal Himself from the search of the devil. For this reason the Holy Church sings concerning Him:

> The Infant weeps with piteous cries,
> As, straiten'd in the crib, He lies.*

From this day forward the circumcision of the flesh ceases; and we Christians have Baptism in its place; a rite of fuller grace and free from pain. Nevertheless, we ought to practise the circumcision of the heart, by divesting ourselves of all that is superfluous, and so cultivating a true poverty of spirit. He alone is truly circumcised in heart, who is truly poor. This, says St. Bernard, the Apostle teaches us in few words, *Having food and raiment let us be therewith content.*† Our spiritual circumcision, too, should appear in all our bodily senses. Let us, then, put restraints on ourselves, in seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, above all, in talking. Talkativeness is a very great vice, unpleasing alike to God and man. We ought, then, to be circumcised in speech; speaking little, and to the point. Much speaking is a sure sign of levity. On the contrary, silence is a noble virtue, and not without great reason especially commended in religious communities. On this subject hear St. Gregory: "He is truly qualified to speak who has first learned to be silent, for the discipline of silence is the only proper nurture of speech."‡

* Vagit Infans inter arcta
Conditus præsepia:
in the Hymn "Pange lingua," sung on Good Friday.

† 1 Tim. vi. 8.

‡ Hom. 11, in Ezech. sub init.

And again in another place: "It is ever the faculty of weak judgments to be rashly forward in speaking; for what a light fancy conceives is readily thrown off by a still lighter tongue." * And St. Bernard says on the same subject, in his sermon on the Epiphany, which begins, "In the works of the Lord," "Who knows not how greatly the tongue defiles us by vain and false speaking, by slanders and flatteries, by words of malice or of boastfulness? To restrain all which, he stands in great need of the fifth water-pot of stone, namely Silence;† a virtue which is, as it were, the sentinel of religious hearts, and their principal safeguard."‡ And elsewhere; "Idleness is the mother of trifling, and a cruel step-mother to virtue. What are trifles in the mouths of laymen are blasphemies in the mouths of clergymen. Priests may sometimes take jokes, but should never bandy them. Thou, O priest, hast consecrated thy lips by pronouncing the holy Gospel; thou canst not, without indecency, open them for unseemly jestings." §

CHAPTER VI.

THE EPIPHANY, OR MANIFESTATION OF OUR LORD.

On this day, which is the twelfth after the Nativity, the Child Jesus vouchsafed to make Himself known to the Gentiles, in the person of the three kings. Render yourself present, then, at every circumstance of this most sa-

* Mor. lib. v. c. 13.
† Alluding to the Miracle of Cana.
‡ Serm. 2, in Dom. 1. post Epiph.
§ De Consid. l. iii.

cred day: for you shall hardly find that any other Festival is solemnized by Holy Church with greater tokens of joy and thanksgiving.* Not that it is greater or more excellent than all other festivals, but only that on this day many things, both great and wonderful, were wrought by our Lord Jesus, and such as chiefly regard the state and circumstances of the Church itself.

First, then, the Church which is gathered from the Gentiles was on this day received by Christ Jesus, in the person of the three kings. For on the day of His birth He had manifested Himself to the shepherds, as representatives of the Jews, from whom, a small number excepted, the WORD of God met with no acceptance. But on this day He made Himself known to the Gentiles, who now form the Church of the elect. And for this reason the Feast of to-day is properly the Feast of the Church, and of all faithful Christians.

Secondly, this day, nine-and-twenty years after His nativity, our Lord Jesus was baptized; by which mystery He spiritually and truly espoused His Holy Church, and united it to Himself. And therefore on this occasion is joyfully sung, *Hodie cœlesti Sponso juncta est Ecclesia.* "This day the Church is wedded to her heavenly Spouse."† For in our baptism our souls are truly espoused and wedded to Him, and the congregation of souls, thus baptized, is called, the Church.

Thirdly, on the same day, a year after His baptism,

* In the original, "with a greater variety of Antiphons, Responsories, Lessons, and all other accompaniments of solemnity."

† The first words of the Antiphon at the *Benedictus* in the Breviary Services for the Feast of the Epiphany.

The two later Epiphanies of our Lord, at His Baptism, and at the Marriage of Cana, are commemorated in our own Church in the Second Lessons proper to the Morning and Evening Service of the Festival.

He wrought His first miracle at the marriage feast, which may be likewise taken allegorically for the spiritual marriage between Him and His Church. It is probable, also, that on the same day, in a later year, our Lord Jesus wrought the miracle of multiplying the loaves and fishes. However, the Church on this day celebrates the three first of these mysteries, and not the last.

Consider hence in how great veneration and esteem this day ought to be held, upon which our Lord Jesus was pleased to perform such wondrous and magnificent works. The holy Church, therefore, mindful of the many benefits conferred upon her this day by her Divine Spouse, and desiring to shew her grateful sense of them, rejoices, sings, and solemnizes the same with the utmost magnificence.

Let us speak, then, of the First of these Epiphanies, since mention of the others will come in the order in which they happened. And even concerning this, that is, the coming of the three kings to Christ our Saviour; my design here is not to take any notice of those learned comments and moral expositions, which many holy men, with great pains and industry, have made on that subject. For the manner in which the three kings came from the east to Jerusalem, for what passed between them and Herod, for what relates to the star that led them, or to the reason of their different offerings, with other things of the same kind, I refer you to the text of the Gospel, and to the commentaries of the Saints on those subjects. For, as I said in the beginning of this work, my intention as well in this, as in all other passages, of the Life of Christ, is only to set down some few meditations, according to the ideas which a pious mind, dwelling on the subject in different lights, may form respecting those things, which either happened in fact, or might have happened, according to reasonable conjecture. But it is by no means my

purpose to act the part of an expositor: partly because I am unequal to the task, and partly because my work would thus proceed to an inconvenient length. Try, then, with renewed attention to render yourself present, as it were, at each particular circumstance of which I am going to speak; for in this, as I have said elsewhere, consists the whole force and efficacy of these meditations.

The three kings, therefore, being come to Bethlehem, with a great multitude of people, and a noble retinue, stopped, as the star directed them, at the little shed in which our Lord Jesus was born. The blessed Virgin hears a confused noise of people at the door, and snatches up her Divine Child. At the same instant the three kings enter the little dwelling, fall on their knees, and worship the Child Jesus, their Lord, with all reverence. They honour Him as their King, and worship Him as their God. Reflect how great must have been their faith! What was there, as far as appearances went, which could have moved them to believe that this little Infant, whom they found in the arms of a mother as poor as Himself, so meanly clad, so miserably housed, without company, attendants, or other signs of dignity, could be in truth a King, and Very God? Yet they believed both. Such are our guides to the feet of Christ, such the great originals it befits us to copy. Behold them still on their knees before Him. And now they begin to converse with the holy Virgin, and ask many questions concerning her beloved Son, which they might do, either by the help of an interpreter, or of themselves, since they were men of great learning, and perhaps versed in the Hebrew language. They inquire of

* curialiter.

her the particular circumstances relating to the wondrous Infant. Our Lady tells them all, and they readily believe all she tells them. Consider them well, how reverently they speak and listen, as if in the presence of royalty.* Consider our Lady, too, how she shrinks from conversing; and how she speaks and hears what is necessary, with a blush on her cheek, and her eyes fixed on the ground. Yet the Lord gave her more than usual strength on this great occasion, and enabled her to support her dignity before these princely worshippers, who represented the whole future Church. Consider, once more, the Child Jesus, who, though not as yet pleased to speak, comports Himself with a sweet gravity beyond His years, as gifted with Divine intelligence, and gently smiles as He looks on them; the while they are wondrously delighted with Him, and gaze upon Him not only with their bodily eyes, but, as it were with the eyes of the mind, as catching somewhat of His illumination, and being drawn towards Him, who was fairer than all the children of men.* At length, full of joy and consolation, they open their coffers, and spreading a carpet at the feet of our Lord Jesus, kneel down before Him, and devoutly offer Him gold, frankincense, and myrrh, of which the gold far exceeded the rest in abundance. For had their offerings been but small, and of little value, they need not have "opened their treasures," as the Gospel says they did, since more scanty and insignificant gifts might have been easily conveyed by the hands of their attendants.

Then they reverently cast themselves on the ground, and devoutly kissed His sacred feet. And why may not we piously imagine, that the blessed Infant, full of Divine

* Ps. xlv. 3.

wisdom, the more to comfort them, and settle their affections on Him, stretched out His little hand for them to kiss, and blessed them with it? After this, they bowed themselves once more, and, taking their leave, retired with joyous and peaceful hearts, and returned by another way into their own country.

But what, think you, did the blessed Virgin do with all this quantity of valuable gold? Did she, think you, hoard it up for her own or her Divine Son's use, or put it out to usury? Did she lay it out in the purchase of houses, lands, or vineyards? No, she was too great a lover of poverty for that. In her zeal for that blessed estate, and with her intimate knowledge of her Son's will, both revealed to her within, and exhibited by infallible tokens without, (since, perhaps, He turned away His eyes from the gold as if with aversion,) she expended the whole, as I judge, in the course of a few days, for the use of the poor. For it was distressing to her to have such a sum in her possession, or to devise means for laying it out upon herself. How, indeed, could any such private use have been found for it by her, who, when she went into the temple at her Purification, had not so much as a single lamb to offer for her Son, but was forced to buy turtle doves or pigeons? It is reasonable, then, to suppose both that the offering of the wise men was costly, and that our Lady, studious of poverty, and full of charity, bestowed it upon the poor.

You have here, gentle reader, before your eyes, the truest and best encomium of poverty: observe, then, the two following points. First, the Child Jesus, and His holy Mother, the blessed Virgin, disdained not to receive alms, like needy persons. Secondly, they were so far from being anxious to obtain riches, or hoard them, that they would not so much as keep what was liberally be-

stowed upon them, increasing daily in the love and desire of poverty.

But have you yet made any reflection on the profound humility which appears in them on this occasion? Surely, if you recollect, you cannot but perceive a most perfect example of it. We daily meet with many, who, in their own sight, are very mean, and not raised by any opinion of merit they experience in themselves, yet are wholly unwilling to appear such in the eyes of others, and cannot easily bear to be despised or derided by any, or to have their faults exposed, or on any account to be held cheap. Not such was the Holy Child Jesus, though Lord of all things: He would have His poverty and the meanness of His condition exposed to all; not to the few, or the vile, but to the many and the great; nay, even to kings, with all their lordly retinue. And this, too, at a time of no little danger. For they who came so far in search of the King of the Jews, whom they believed to be God and Lord of all things, finding Him in so poor and humble a condition, might well have thought themselves deluded, and have returned home without either faith or devotion. But this hindered not our true Lover of humility from giving us so rare an example, that we might learn from Him never to forget lowliness in the prospect of any specious though unreal good, but gladly to make ourselves vile in the eyes of others as well as our own.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN REMAINS AT THE MANGER, TILL THE FULL TERM OF FORTY DAYS IS EXPIRED.

When the blessed Virgin had disposed of the treasures, she still remained, with her Divine Son Jesus, and her holy partner and protector, St. Joseph, in the humble shed at Bethlehem, waiting with patience in that miserable dwelling till the fortieth day from the Nativity, just as if she had been any ordinary mother, and her blessed Son any ordinary child, subject to defilement, and so needing purification. But because they would enjoy no special prerogatives, they voluntarily, and without necessity, submitted to the law made for others. The practice of many is the reverse of this; for, living among the mass, in no way distinguished from others, they yet claim to themselves singular and undue honours. Not such is the method of true humility.

Our blessed Lady then, like other women, remained expecting the day on which she was to enter into the temple. She remained watching, and intent upon the care of her beloved Son. And O, with what diligence and solicitude did she tend Him, lest any the least thing perchance should trouble or molest Him! With what reverence, caution, and awe did she handle Him, whom she knew to be her sovereign Lord and God, never taking Him from the manger-cradle, or replacing Him in it, but on her bended knees! With what unspeakable pleasure, confidence, and motherly affection would she embrace Him, kiss Him, sweetly press Him, and

take delight in Him whom she knew to be her Son! How often did she examine, with a kind of innocent and reverent curiosity, His blessed countenance and graceful form! How composedly and discreetly was she used to bind and swathe His tender limbs! for as she was most humble, so was she also most prudent, and hence she exercised the utmost care in performing every needful office towards Him, whether waking or sleeping; and this not only when He was quite an infant, but as He grew up. O, with what a free and willing mind did she ever give Him nourishment at her sacred breast! It can hardly be imagined but that in suckling so Divine a Babe, she felt a pleasure quite unknown to common mothers. And St. Bernard expresses his belief, that St. Joseph used often to take the Holy Child upon his knees and fondly caress Him. And now place yourself with the blessed Virgin at the manger, and delight yourself often with the Child Jesus, because virtue goes forth from Him. For every devout and pious soul, from Christmas to the Purification, ought, at least once a day, in spirit, to visit the manger with our Lady, to adore the Child Jesus, and meditate devoutly on the poverty, humility, and benignity, as well of the Mother as of the Son.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PURIFICATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

Now when the fortieth day was come, as prescribed by the Law, our Lady, with the Child Jesus and St. Joseph, set out from Bethlehem on her way to Jeru-

salem, about six miles distant, there to present her blessed Son to the Lord, as it is written in the Law.* Do you in thought go with them, and help the sacred Virgin to carry her Divine Infant; and fix your mind, as if present, on all which is now to be said or done, for it is a subject of the most exalted devotion.

Thus then do they bring the Lord of the temple to the temple of the Lord. At the entrance they buy a pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons, to offer to God for Him, as was the custom of other poor people. But as they were poorer even than most, we may rather suppose, that their offerings consisted only of two pigeons, which were of less price than the doves; and for that reason are mentioned the last in the Law. And the holy Evangelist takes no notice here of a lamb, which was the usual offering of the rich. At this time the holy Simeon, who was a man both just and devout, came with haste into the temple to see Christ the Son of God, whom the Holy Ghost had promised that he should see before his death. He no sooner beheld the Divine Babe, than he knew Him by the spirit of prophecy within him, and pressing towards Him, fell on his knees and worshipped Him in His Mother's arms. The holy Infant blessed him; and looking earnestly upon His Mother, bent forward, in token that He desired to go to him. This His Mother understanding, gave Him to Simeon, who with joy and reverence received Him in his arms; and then arose, and, blessing God, said: *Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace*, and the rest; prophesying many things concerning His Passion. And holy Anna, the prophetess, came up at that instant, and, worshipping Him, also spoke many things relating to

* Levit. xii.

Him. But Mary, wondering at all these things, kept them close in her heart. At length, the Child Jesus stretching forth His arms towards His Mother, was again received by her. After this, they advance towards the altar, in the manner of a procession, which is annually represented throughout the Church on Candlemas-day. First went the two venerable old men, Joseph and Simeon, hand in hand, singing with transports of joy: *O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is gracious, and His mercy endureth for ever. The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works. For this God is our God for ever and ever. We wait for Thy loving kindness, O God, in the midst of Thy temple.** These were followed by the sacred Mother herself, bearing in her arms Jesus the Infant King, with Anna by her side, she pouring forth her soul in thanksgiving beyond expression, in which her companion joined her. These, then, were all who formed this procession, which, though consisting of few persons, represented great mysteries; for these were but the first-fruits of an innumerable company of every sex and every state, youth, celibacy, marriage, and widowhood. When they were come to the altar, the holy Mother knelt down, with all reverence and devotion, and offered her dearest Son to His heavenly Father, saying: "Vouchsafe, O most sovereign Lord, to receive this Thy beloved Son, whom, according to the commandment of Thy Law, I here offer unto Thee as the first-born of His mother. But I beseech Thy mercy, most gracious Father, to vouchsafe to restore Him again to me." And then rising, she laid Him upon the altar. O great God, and most merciful Lord, what a precious and most acceptable Offering was this! such surely as had never

* Ps. xcviii. cxlv. xlviii.

before been made from the beginning of time, nor shall ever be made again.

Consider each point attentively. The blessed Infant Jesus quietly remains upon the altar, like any other little child, and with a look of intelligence beyond his years,* fixes His eyes upon His Mother, and the rest who stand about Him, humbly waiting with patience, to see what more is to be done. The priests enter solemnly with their attendants, and the Sovereign Lord of all things is redeemed like a slave at the low price of five pence, or five small pieces of coin called shekels, the sum given for other poor children. After Joseph had paid them to the priest, the blessed Mother joyfully received Him again into her arms. Then taking from Joseph the above-mentioned pair of pigeons, she knelt down, and lifting up her eyes devoutly to heaven, offered them, saying: "Vouchsafe, most merciful Father, to accept this offering, the first little gift which Thy beloved Son, of His extreme poverty, this day presents unto Thee!" Then He, stretching forth His hands towards the little birds, raised His eyes to heaven, and though He said nothing, yet signified by His gestures that He offered them together with His Mother. And so she left them upon the altar.

Consider here, Christian reader, and diligently contemplate the great dignity and majesty of those who make this offering: the blessed Virgin Mother, and her Divine Son, Jesus. Could such an offering, think you, though a little one, be rejected of God? No; rather may we devoutly suppose it to have been carried up to heaven by the hands of Angels, and there presented by them, and to have been most graciously accepted, at the Eternal

* Facie maturâ.

Throne, amidst the joyful thanksgivings of the whole company of blessed spirits.

The offering having been duly made, the holy Virgin quitted Jerusalem, on her return home to Nazareth. On the way, she stopped at the house of St. Elizabeth, wishing to see St. John before she left the neighbourhood. Do you accompany her whithersoever she goes, and in devout meditation assist her to carry the Babe. When our blessed Lady and St. Elizabeth met, they were extremely overjoyed at the sight of each other, but more especially in beholding each their blessed Sons, Jesus and John, who, with no less tokens of joy, lovingly congratulated one another; and St. John, as conscious of the dignity of His sacred Guest, behaved towards Him with the utmost submission and respect. Do you also reverently receive the child John, for he is great in the sight of the Lord, and haply he may give you a blessing. When the holy parents had rested there some few days, they proceeded on their way to Nazareth. And here, if you wish, from what has already been said, to learn the poverty and humility they practised, you need only consider the meanness of their offering, the humility shewn in ransoming the blessed Infant, and their strict compliance in both instances with the precepts of God's holy Law.

CHAPTER IX.

OUR LORD'S FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

As the parents of our Lord Jesus were proceeding on their journey to Nazareth, unapprised as yet of the Divine counsels, and of Herod's machinations against

the life of the blessed Infant, the Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, warning him to flee with the Babe and His Mother into Egypt, — because Herod was bent on seeking the young Child's life. St. Joseph arose from his sleep, aroused the blessed Virgin, and acquainted her with the Angel's warning. She, suddenly starting up, proposed setting off without a moment's delay; for she was shocked to the very soul by the tidings, and would neglect no step which might tend to the safety of her beloved Son. Accordingly both of them set out with Him that very night, by a private way, towards Egypt. Here follow them in meditation: behold how they snatch up the sleeping Infant: feel for their distress; and reap the benefit of the many profitable thoughts which the subject suggests.

And first, consider the alternations of prosperity and adversity which our Saviour underwent in His own Person. And when the like changes happen to you, learn to bear them with the patience becoming His follower. Remember that every mountain has a valley near it. Thus Christ was no sooner born than glorified by the shepherds as God; yet how shortly after His birth was He circumcised, as if a sinner! Then came the wise men, and honoured Him with extraordinary devotion, the while He remained in a shed with brute beasts, crying like any poor man's child. Afterwards, He was solemnly presented in the temple, and gloriously celebrated by Simeon and Anna. And now He is warned by an Angel to flee into Egypt. You may find in His Life many other like instances, and such as admit, with a little attention, of being turned to the greatest account. When, therefore, you are receiving comfort, look for affliction; and when in affliction, expect to be comforted. In this way we ought to be neither elated by joys nor

crushed by tribulations. For it is our Lord's good pleasure to checquer sorrows with intervals of joy, the better to nourish hope, and preserve us from being borne away by a tide of troubles; and, again, to send us distresses in the midst of our happiness, in order to keep us humble, and that we may ever stand in awe under the consciousness of our misery. Let us, then, consider how our Lord did all these things for our instruction, and to conceal Himself from His Enemy.

Secondly, observe, while upon the subject of the Divine favours and consolations, that those who enjoy them have no right to set themselves up against such as enjoy them not. This I gather from the visit of the Angel, which was vouchsafed, not to Mary, but to Joseph, who was greatly her inferior. And, again, when we find Joseph, though so eminent in the sight of God, favoured with an angelic visit, not openly, but in a dream, we may learn not to be ungrateful to God for the gifts of His bounty, by repining when they are not bestowed just in the way we might desire.

Thirdly, consider how God permits His chosen to be harassed by tribulations and persecutions. It was no doubt a great affliction to our Lord's Mother and St. Joseph to find that His life was threatened. Indeed, what more distressing news could be brought them? It is true, they knew Him to be the Son of God; but that was not enough to secure the inferior part of their nature from grief and perplexity. Might they not have said, "Why, O Lord, since Thou art Almighty, should it be necessary to escape with Thy Son into Egypt? Is not Thy power sufficient to protect Him?" Add to this, that they were reduced to the painful necessity of fleeing from their native land to a distant unknown country, through rough and perilous roads, unfit as they were for the fatigues and

dangers of the journey; our Lady, because so young, and Joseph, because advanced in years. The Divine Child also, whom they had to carry, was scarcely two months old; and they were to dwell as strangers in a foreign country, and were so poor as to be in want of the very necessaries of life. All these were indeed very real grievances. Do you, therefore, when in tribulation, arm yourself with patience, and expect not from your Divine Master privileges which He did not think fit to reserve for His Mother or Himself.

Fourthly, consider His unspeakable kindness. How soon and how patiently does He submit, for your sake, to persecution and banishment from His own country, and how meekly does He yield to the fury of the tyrant, whom, had He so pleased, He could have destroyed in a moment! O how profound is that patience and humility! He will neither injure His enemy, nor retaliate when injured, but meekly contents Himself with withdrawing from the snare. The like deportment does it befit us to observe towards such as despitefully use us and persecute us. Instead of making a return in kind, or wreaking our vengeance upon our enemies, let us bear their reproaches with patience, while endeavouring to shun the effects of their malice; what is more, let us pray for them, returning them good for evil, as our Lord has taught us in other parts of the Gospel.

Once more; our Lord submitted to flee from the face of His slave; nay, rather of the Devil's slave. In this journey He was carried by a tender Mother in her earliest youth, and by St. Joseph, a feeble old man, through a rough, wild, dreary, pathless, unfrequented, tedious line of road, into Egypt: a journey which requires a fortnight for a courier to perform, travelling post; but which they, perhaps, were two months or more in effecting.

For, if we may credit tradition, they crossed the desert in which the children of Israel wandered forty years. What means too had they of carrying provisions with them? And where, think you, did they find rest and shelter during the night? Houses are but rarely found in a desert. Compassionate them accordingly; for they must, doubtless, have laboured under many, great, and continued difficulties and hardships, as well they in their persons as the Infant Jesus in His. Do you go along with them in mind, and help them to carry the Blessed Infant: and desire to alleviate their distresses to the utmost of your power. Refuse not hardship and penance for yourselves, you for whom so much has been borne and done by others, and that oftentimes. And by what others! I will not give you any particulars of what happened to them on their way, because the accounts are very doubtful. Upon their entrance into Egypt, all the idols in the country fell in pieces, as had been foretold by Isaiah.* They travelled as far as Heliopolis, and there, renting a little cottage, they dwelt for seven years, as poor, indigent, homeless strangers.

And here we enter into an ample and beautiful field of pious and tender contemplation. Attend, then, diligently to what follows. Whence, and by what means, did they procure a subsistence for so long a period? Do you suppose that they passed their time in begging? No; we are told by several sacred writers, how ingenious as well as industrious our blessed Lady was at her needle and distaff, and that she was extremely diligent in working for the support of her beloved Son and spouse. This queenly Virgin was so in love with poverty, that she passed her time in sewing and spinning. Indeed, they were all constant lovers of poverty from the beginning, and

* xix. 1.

continued so to the end, of their immaculate lives. Now, may we not suppose that she was reduced to go from house to house to ask for work? For she must have taken means for making her wants and intentions known to the neighbourhood, otherwise she must have remained idle; for the women of the city could not possibly have divined her wishes. And when Jesus came to be about five years of age, or thereabouts, may we not devoutly believe that He carried messages for His Mother, going about in quest of work for her; for what other page can we suppose she had? And did He not also carry back the work when done, and, in His Mother's behalf, ask at least for part of the price, and receive payment? Did not the Child Jesus, think you, the SON of GOD, blush at being so occupied, as well as His Mother, who sent Him? And what if, at these times, when He had restored the work, and asked the price, some haughty, quarrelsome, and loquacious dame should have given Him an insolent reply, and, after taking the work, have driven Him away without the money, so that He must needs return home empty-handed? How many such insults are daily offered to poor helpless strangers! And these our Lord came on earth not to shun, but to seek. What, too, if He often came home hungry, as children are apt to be, and, asking His Mother for bread, was answered with a sigh, that she had none to give Him? What must not have been her deep anguish of spirit upon such occasions! With what tender words would she try to allay His hunger, with what diligence labour to get Him something by her work, and perhaps reserve for Him her own scanty pittance of food! These, and such like points in the infancy of the Holy Jesus, are exceedingly fit for meditation. I have here given you a clue, and you may follow out the thought by yourself; becoming little with the Little One,

and not scorning to dwell upon matters which some may look upon as low and childish. For they are capable of inspiring devotion, promoting love, and giving new warmth to our religious affections. Moreover, they tend to excite compassion, to make us lowlier and more pure, to foster the love of holy poverty, in short, to improve our acquaintance with all those Divine virtues which shine forth conspicuously in our Lord, and lead us into conformity with them, and finally, to raise and strengthen our hopes of enjoying the blessed fruits of that Goodness which we so much admire, and wish to imitate. We cannot of ourselves lift up our hearts to God. But, *The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.** Such meditations, too, will tend to abate pride, quell ambition, and cure all vain curiosity. See you, then, what good comes of such holy exercises? Well, then, try, as I have said, to become little with the Little Child, that you may, without danger to humility, "increase in stature" with Him, and follow Him whithersoever He goes, and evermore behold His face.

But have you yet reflected enough on what has been said, to feel, how laborious their poverty must have been, and how painful to bashful souls? And besides, if they were compelled to seek food by the work of their hands, what shall we say about clothing? What, too, about furniture, such as beds, and other household articles? Suppose you that they had more than one of each sort, or that they admitted anything superfluous or of curious workmanship? No; these things are contrary to the rule of poverty, and accordingly, though our Lady might innocently have possessed them, yet she was too great a

* 1 Cor. i. 25.

lover of poverty to do so. Or, again, do you suppose that with her needle, or in other ways, she ever wrought works of ingenious texture, and such as minister to luxury, rather than serve the ends of necessity? I think not. Such is the employment of those who have time to lose. She was in far too straitened circumstances to find leisure for vanities; besides, she would have declined them even otherwise. Indeed, this is a very dangerous kind of idleness, and especially in our own days. Would you know why? Then listen. First, the time which is given us to devote to the glory of God is thus expended upon trifles which rather prejudice than advance His glory. These curious works require far more pains than it is well to bestow upon them, and this is in itself no small evil. Secondly, they are on occasion of vanity to the doers of them. How many self-complacent looks and vain-glorious thoughts are bestowed upon them, not merely while they are going on, but out of working time! Nay, sometimes even when the workman or workwoman should be at their prayers, they are thinking about the beauty of their performance, and applauding themselves for it, and considering how much credit they shall gain by it! Thirdly, therefore, as these things tend to vanity, or love of the world, so likewise do they lead to proud thoughts of self. Experience shews us that they are the very oil which feeds the fire of pride. For as what is mean and lowly cherishes humility, so what is curious and gaudy nourishes pride and self-importance. Fourthly, they are the means of estranging the soul from God; for St. Gregory says, "The more a soul is employed upon earthly objects, the more is it weaned from the love of God."* Fifthly, they are incitements to the "lust

* Hom. xxx. in Evang.

of the eye," one of the three great sources of sin in the world: for such vain objects can be of no other use than to feed vain eyes. And yet as often as any one takes delight in gazing on such idle vanities, whether it be the maker or the wearer of them, so often does that person displease God. Sixthly, they are but too often a snare and bane to such as look upon them; for example, giving occasion of scandal, or covetousness, or envy, or harsh judgments, or secret repining, or open detraction.

Think, therefore, in how many ways God may be displeased before these vanities are brought to a conclusion; and that for all these mischiefs the maker is answerable. And therefore, were I to bid you work at such things for me, and were you to know that I should certainly make use of them, you ought not to comply, because you must on no account contribute to vanity in others; and must strictly avoid whatever may possibly tend to displease God. How much more blameable, then, are you, if you do it of your own accord, to ingratiate yourself in the eyes of the creature rather than the Creator? Leave, therefore, to worldlings such works as are properly of the world, but an offence to God. I own, I cannot but wonder that persons aiming at a perfect life should venture upon busying themselves about such trifles, and soil their hands with them. It is plain, then, how many evils come of indulging in these curiosities: not one of the least of which is this; that they tend to bring the blessed estate of poverty into disrepute. To conclude; employments of this kind are strong symptoms of levity, vanity, and unsteadiness of mind, in the greater part of those who give themselves up to them, and, where this is so, I would have you, O devout Christian, flee both from the making and the using of such trifles as from a venomous serpent. Not, however, that I would be understood to condemn all

beautiful and ingenious works of art, and especially when devoted to the adornment of churches, and the beautifying of God's worship; provided always that they be not made occasions of vanity, and do not engross the heart. Hear what St. Bernard thinks of such curiosities. "Tell me, I beseech you," says he, "of what use can such vanities be, whether to body or soul? They are at best but a poor, empty, childish satisfaction. And it were hard to invent a severer imprecation on those, who, despising the sweet enjoyments of religious peace, delight in the restlessness of curiosity, than to wish that they may be condemned to the possession of what they so anxiously covet." *

* De Conversione, c. viii.

[This digression gives an opportunity of making some remarks, which are also applicable, in a measure, to other passages of these meditations. We find the author, in the present instance, passing judgment in the austere and unearthly spirit of a Saint, upon modes of obtaining a livelihood, which, in our own time, are apt to be taken up without scruple, and are often, we may confidently trust and believe, pursued without sin. The language of a Saint upon such a subject, spoken, too, with evident reference to persons devoted to a life of religion, must of course be taken with a certain reserve in its application to circumstances like our own; otherwise the exhibition of such holy laments and unbending censures will be apt to lead to one, or perhaps both, of two enormous evils; the infliction on tender minds of the most agonizing doubt and the most piercing distress, or the confirmation of hardened ones in their contempt of all strict religion. Let the severe reflections, then, made in the text upon the employment of precious time upon ornamental work be neither put aside as a piece of unpractical declamation, nor taken without a due, and yet only a due, regard to the person by whom, and the circumstances under which, the solemn remonstrance was uttered. While it need not *necessarily* suggest painful scruples, or create dissatisfaction with a state of life not perhaps of our own choosing, and, though full of peril, not in itself essentially wrong, yet certainly it has that undeniable air of truth and fidelity to Scripture about it, which may well render it a

But let us return from this long digression, into which this abomination of vain trifling has led me, to our blessed Lady in Egypt, whom we left amidst her labours of sewing, knitting, and spinning. Think how diligently, humbly, and patiently she persevered in these employments, without slackening in the least her motherly care of her Divine Son, or the business of her family, and how assiduous she was in her devout exercises of watching and prayer, as often as her necessary occupations left her the time for them. Compassionate her, therefore, with all the affection of which you are capable, and reflect; Since even the Mother of my Lord was obliged to work for a heavenly Kingdom, how dare I stand idle? It is not improbable, however, that some charitable matrons of the neighbourhood, witnesses of her extreme poverty, might now and then send her some small relief, which she submitted to accept with humility and thankfulness. Besides, it is also probable that the holy Joseph was as industrious as his great age would permit, and worked some little at his trade of a carpenter. Thus, you see, what ample subjects of compassion rise before you at every step. Pause here awhile: then asking, on bended knees, the blessing of the Divine Infant Jesus, take your humble leave of Him, not forgetting a respectful obeisance to His Blessed

most valuable guide to self-examination. Moreover, the indulgence which ought in fairness, as well as charity, to be extended to those with whom working for superfluous objects is a matter of necessity, or compulsion, cannot evidently be claimed by those, of whom it may be feared there are not a few among us, who spend upon trifling, all the more dangerous because it looks like occupation, the hours which they grudge to objects of devotion or charity; or who misspend upon themselves, or upon the world, the ingenuity and the resources which, as St. Bonaventure observes in the text, are then employed most agreeably to God's intention, when devoted to the service of the sanctuary.—Ed.]

Mother and St. Joseph, who, with Him, are to remain some years in their present abode; banished their country, and compelled to earn their bread in the sweat of their brow.

CHAPTER X.

OUR LORD'S RETURN FROM EGYPT.

When our Lord had completed His seven years' banishment in Egypt, an Angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying; *Arise, and take the young Child and His Mother, and go into the land of Israel, for they are dead which sought the young Child's life. And he arose and took the young Child and His Mother, and came into the land of Israel.** But when he heard that Archelaus, the son of Herod, reigned there, he began to dread going any farther, till he was again instructed by the Angel to retire into Galilee, to the city of Nazareth. His return, according to the Martyrology, was much about the time of the Epiphany.

Here again, you see, as before, how God often sends His revelations, spiritual comforts, and other graces only as it were by halves, and not according to the fulness of our wishes. This may appear from two circumstances. First, from His sending the Angel to Joseph, not openly, but in a dream. Secondly, from the Angel's not giving him his whole instructions at once, but at two separate times. Indeed the old commentary says, that God did so, because the repetition of visions increases our certainty of

* Matt. ii. 20, 21.

them. But, be that as it may, we ought to prize every the least revelation which God vouchsafes, and be grateful for it, since we may be sure that He disposes all in the way which He knows to be best for us.

But now let us keep to our Saviour's return from Egypt, and be very attentive to it; it is rich in matter of pious meditation. Return then to Egypt to visit the Child Jesus; there you will, perhaps, find Him out of doors amongst other children, and, upon seeing you, He will run of His own accord to meet you; for He is all affability, bounty, and courtesy. Fly then to prevent Him, and throwing yourself on your knees, adore and kiss His sacred feet: then rising, take Him into your arms, devoutly embrace Him, and rest awhile in His company. He will then, perhaps, say to you; "We are again at liberty to return to our own country, and to-morrow we are to go from here; you have come at a good time, for you shall join us in our journey." To which do you eagerly reply, that His goodness fills you with joy, that you desire to follow Him whithersoever He goes, and that you delight in conversing with Him. I have already told you that points of this kind will certainly seem childish in the eyes of worldlings; yet, for all this, you will gain the utmost profit from a devout and frequent meditation on them, and they will dispose you to greater and higher things. After this, He will lead you to His Mother, who will give you a kind and courteous reception. Do you pay her and her holy spouse due honour, and remain in their company.

The next morning, when they are ready to set out on their journey, you will see some of the most venerable matrons of the city, and the wiser part of the men, come to accompany them out of the gates, in acknowledgment of their peaceful and pious manner of life, while among

them. For they had given notice, throughout the neighbourhood, some days before, of their intention to depart, that they might not seem to steal away in a clandestine manner, which might have looked suspicious; the very reverse of their proceeding when they fled into Egypt, at which time their fear for the Infant obliged them to secrecy. And now they set out on their journey; holy Joseph, accompanied by the men, going before, and our Lady following at some distance, with the matrons. Do you take the blessed Infant in your arms, and devoutly carry Him before her, for she will not suffer Him out of her sight.

When they were out of the gates, the holy Joseph dismissed the company, whereupon one of them, who happened to be rich, called the Child Jesus to him, and, compassionating the poverty of His parents, bestowed a few pence upon Him; and many others of the number followed the example of the first, and did the same. The Holy Child is not a little abashed by the offer, yet, out of love to poverty, He holds out His little hands, and, blushing, takes the money, for which He returns thanks. The matrons then call Him, and do the same. Nor is the Mother less abashed than her Son; however, she makes them her humble acknowledgments. Do you share His confusion and that of His holy parents, and meditate on the great lesson here set you, when you see Him whose is *the earth and the fulness thereof** making choice of so rigorous a poverty, and so necessitous a life, for Himself, His blessed Mother, and holy foster-father. What lustre does not the virtue of poverty receive from their practice! And how can we behold it in them, without being moved to the love and imitation of their examples? After returning thanks to

* Ps. xxiv. 1.

their company, and taking their leave, they proceed on their journey. But how, do you think, will the Infant Jesus be able to go through the fatigues of so great an undertaking? This new journey seems far more arduous than the former. When he went into Egypt, the smallness of His size made it easy for His parents to carry Him; but now He is too big to be carried, yet too little and tender to walk by Himself. Possibly indeed some one of those kind-hearted neighbours gave, or lent, them an ass to carry Him. O Thou peerless and delicate Youth, Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth! What labours didst Thou undergo for us, and how early didst Thou enter upon them! Well did the Prophet say in Thy person: *I am poor, and in labours from my youth.** What rigorous privations, what incessant labours, what bodily hardships, didst Thou not assume for our sakes! Thou didst deal with Thyself like an enemy, for love of us. Surely this one tribulation on which we are now meditating had sufficed to redeem us! Take then the Child Jesus, and set Him on the ass, conduct Him like a trusty guide, and when He is inclined to dismount, receive Him joyfully in your arms, and hold Him awhile till His blessed Mother comes up: for she walks more slowly, or, at least, at a more even pace. Then the Holy Child will go to her, and the joy of receiving Him will stand her in the place of repose. Thus they proceed, and again pass the desert by which they came. You will find much reason to compassionate them on the journey, on account of the little rest they get after the fatigue of travelling night and day. When they had arrived almost at the skirt of the wilderness, they found there John the Baptist, who, though exempted from sin, had already begun to do penance. It

* *Vid.* Ps. lxxxviii. 15.

is said, that the part of the Jordan in which John baptized, is that over which the children of Israel passed, when they came through this desert on their way from Egypt; and that John did penance near the same place. So that it is at least possible that the Child Jesus might find him there on His return from Egypt. Fancy then you see him joyfully receiving them: while they, remaining with him awhile, and partaking of his coarse and homely fare, share with him, in return, the sweets of spiritual refreshment, and then take their leave of him. Do you, then, both at meeting and at parting, pay your reverence to the Saint; throw yourself at his feet, and devoutly kissing them, entreat his blessing, and commend yourself to his prayers; for excellent, indeed, and very wonderful is that youth, even from his cradle. He was the first of hermits, the founder and pattern of all who make choice of a religious and solitary life. He was an unspotted virgin, a consummate preacher, more than a prophet, and withal a glorious martyr. After parting from John, the blessed travellers crossed the Jordan, and called at the house of Elizabeth, where they passed some time in mutual congratulations and high spiritual joy. Here Joseph, on being informed that Archelaus, the son of Herod, reigned in Judea, was full of alarm; and, an Angel having warned him in a dream, they retired to Nazareth, in Galilee.

And now we have brought back the Child Jesus from Egypt; upon His return, the sisters, and other relations and friends of our blessed Lady came, in a body, to make her visits of congratulation. At Nazareth they continue in retirement, and in the practice of poverty. From this time, to His twelfth year of age, nothing remarkable is recorded of the blessed Jesus. It is said, however, and is not improbable, that the fountain is still to be seen there,

out of which He used to draw water for His Mother. For our truly humble Lord often performed such menial offices for her, as she had no one else to do them. Here, too, we may suppose, that St. John the Evangelist, who was then about five years old, often came to visit our Lord, accompanied by his mother, who was sister to the blessed Virgin. For it is written of him, that he died sixty-seven years after our Lord's Passion, in the ninety-eighth year of his age; so that at the time of Christ's suffering, which was when He was something turned of thirty-three years old, St. John was thirty-one; and, consequently, the one being seven years old at His return from Egypt, the other must have been five. Imagine, then, you see these holy Children standing together and conversing, and contemplate them, as our Lord may vouchsafe to enable you. It will greatly help your meditation to reflect that this John was afterwards the disciple whom Jesus loved, and with whom He conversed more familiarly than with any other.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHILD JESUS TARRIES BEHIND IN JERUSALEM.

When our Lord was twelve years old, He went up with His parents to Jerusalem, according to the law and custom of the feast, which lasted eight days. Again, then, the Holy Child Jesus undertakes a long and laborious journey, to honour His heavenly Father on the days consecrated to Him; for infinite was the love between the Father and the Son. But great as was the joy which

the outward pomp and honour paid to His Father gave Him, it fell far short of the affliction and bitterness of spirit which He felt on account of the transgressions by which sinners dishonour Him. Thus, then, was the Lord of the Law observant of His own law; and humbly conversed among men like one of the least of His creatures. When the days of the feast were ended, and His parents returned home, He tarried behind in Jerusalem. Here be very attentive, and place yourself in the midst of all which passes; you will find matter in it of most profitable devotion. I have already told you that Nazareth, where our Lord dwelt, is about seventy miles from Jerusalem. When, therefore, in the evening, our blessed Lady and St. Joseph, who had taken different roads, met at the inn where they were to put up for the night; the Virgin not seeing her Son with her spouse, in whose company she expected Him to return, says to him: "Where is the Child?" — "Is He not with you?" replies St. Joseph; "I know not where He is; He did not return with me." Shocked at this answer, the agonized Mother bursts into tears, crying: "No; ah, no! He has not been with me. Alas, alas, is this the care I have taken of my Child?" and, rushing out, late as it was, she went from house to house, with all the composure such grief allowed, saying to one, "Have you seen my Child?" and to another, "Have you seen my Child?" hardly knowing, in her grief and anxiety, what she said. St. Joseph followed her in tears, seeking to give her comfort. But what comfort could either of them receive, when they found Him not? What, suppose you, must their sorrow have been, His Mother's especially, who was so devoted to Him? And though her familiars sought to cheer her, she would not be comforted. For what must it have been, to lose Jesus? Do you behold her, and condole with her, for her soul is in an-

guish; never since she was born did she suffer aught like this. Let us not, then, be cast down, when affliction comes upon us, since our Lord saw not fit to spare even His Mother. It is His own especially, whom He suffers to be afflicted; afflictions are tokens of His love; it is good for us to receive them.

The blessed Virgin at length shut herself up in her chamber, and throwing herself on her knees, not without tears, addressed herself after this manner to God: "O my Father, my eternal Lord, my all-gracious and merciful Benefactor! Thou didst vouchsafe to bestow Thy beloved Son upon me, and I, alas, have lost Him; nor know I where to seek Him. Restore Him to me, I most humbly beseech Thee. Take away, O Father, this bitterness from me, and shew me Thy Son! Father, look upon the affliction of my heart, and not on my neglect. I have been careless; but it was in ignorance. Of Thy great goodness, restore Him to me: I cannot live without Him. O dearest Son, where art Thou? What has befallen Thee? Who now enjoys the blessing of cherishing Thee in my stead? Art Thou returned to heaven to Thy Father? I know Thou art the Son of God, and God Thyself! But why didst Thou not tell me Thou wert going? Or rather, has not some treacherous mortal waylaid Thee? For I know Thou art truly Man, begotten of this flesh of mine. Too well I remember hurrying Thee away to Egypt when Herod sought Thy life. But, O, may Thy heavenly Father preserve Thee from harm, my Child! Tell me, my Son, where Thou art, and I will come to Thee, or do Thou come back to me. Spare methis once, and I will never neglect Thee more. When did I ever offend Thee, my Son, that Thou shouldest leave me thus? I know Thou art privy to all my grief. O my Son, delay not to return to me.

Did I, ever since I have borne Thee, eat, sleep, or live without Thee before? And now I am without Thee, not knowing how it has come to pass. Thou knowest Thou art my life, my joy, and that without Thee I cannot subsist. Shew me, then, where Thou art, and how I may find Thee."

With these, and suchlike ejaculations, the holy Mother of Christ poured forth her soul the whole night through, in sorrow for her dearest Son. At break of day, they went forth in quest of Him round all the neighbouring villages; for there were many ways from Jerusalem to the place where they then were. Not finding Him that day, they went the next to other places, and along other roads, in search of Him, making inquiries among all their friends and relations. And now the afflicted Mother gives Him up for lost, and refuses all comfort. But the third day they returned to Jerusalem, and found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors. No sooner did the blessed Virgin cast her eye on this beloved Child, than she seemed like one coming to life again; throwing herself on her knees, she bursts into tears, and gives thanks to God. The Child Jesus, seeing His Mother, came up to her, and she, clasping Him in her arms, pressed, embraced, and sweetly fondled Him. Now she tenderly prints her kisses on His cheeks, and holding Him to her bosom, stands awhile quite motionless, unable, as yet, to speak, through excess of tender transport. At length she says, looking wistfully on Him, "*Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? Behold, Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.*"* Then He: "*How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?*"† But this saying of His they did not

* Luke, ii. 48. † Ib. 49.

understand. Then His Mother says, "Son, it is my desire to go back to our old way of life. Do you not wish to go with me?" "Yes," He answers, "your will shall be Mine." And so He returned with them to Nazareth.

You have now seen the affliction of the blessed Mother on this occasion. But how was her Son occupied those three days? Imagine you see Him at the door of some poor man, bashfully craving admittance. He is received, and sparingly helped to eat, poor among the poor. Next consider Him sitting in the midst of the doctors; where, with a serene, wise, and reverent countenance, He listens to them, and asks them, as if ignorant of what He asks: all which He does, partly out of humility, and partly out of a desire not to confound them with the miraculous promptness and pertinency of His answers.

Here, likewise, you may consider three very remarkable truths. The first is, that whoever wishes to cleave close to God must not linger among parents, friends, or relations. For the Child Jesus, when He was intent upon His heavenly Father's business, put His dearest Mother away from Him, and, when afterwards sought, was not to be found among any of His kinsfolk and acquaintance. The second is, that no one who leads a spiritual life ought to wonder if at times he suffers from a dryness of spirit, feeling as if God had forsaken him, since the same thing happened even to the Mother of God. Let not such an one then be cast down by over-much sorrow, but rather let him seek Him diligently, by persisting in devout meditations and good works, and he will find Him again. The third is, that each one should be ready to give up his own will, and to part, if necessary, with the favourite object of his heart. For, though our Lord Jesus had said that it was proper

for Him to attend to the business of His heavenly Father, yet He changed His purpose, and followed the wishes of His blessed Mother, accompanying her and her holy spouse to Nazareth, where He remained, and was subject unto them.* Where you may likewise admire His humility, of which we shall have more to say in a while.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LIFE OF OUR LORD FROM THE TWELFTH TO THE THIRTIETH YEAR OF HIS AGE.

Our Lord Jesus, therefore, returned from the temple and from Jerusalem with His parents to Nazareth, and lived with them, and under their obedience, till the beginning of His thirtieth year. Nor do we hear in Holy Scripture of anything which He did during the whole of that time; which appears very wonderful. What, then, shall we admire in Him, or conceive Him to have done, during so long an interval? Did the Lord Jesus remain idle all that time? Did He perform no action worthy the notice of Scripture? If He did, why is it not recorded, like the rest of His actions? It seems quite a marvel. But take notice here, that His doing nothing wonderful was in itself a kind of wonder. For His whole Life is a mystery; and as there was power in His actions, so was there power in His silence, in His inactivity, and in His retirement. This Sovereign Master, then, who was to teach all virtues, and to point out the way

* Luke, ii. 51.

of Life, began from His youth up, by sanctifying in His own Person the practice of the virtuous life He came to teach, but in a wondrous, unfathomable, and, till then, unheard-of manner; that is, by making Himself seem, in the eyes of the world, useless, vile, and foolish; all which we may devoutly conceive without any danger of presumption. Not, however, that in these meditations, as I have already said, I intend to affirm anything which is not evidently warranted by the authority of the Divine Scriptures, or the sacred doctors.

Our Saviour then withdrew Himself from the company and conversation of men. He went to the synagogue, which was to Him the Church. There would He remain for a long time in prayer, putting Himself in the lowest place. And then He would return home to His blessed Mother and her holy spouse, whom He would often help in his work. Going and returning, He would pass through the crowd as if He saw no one. All wonder that so fair a Youth should do nothing which they could find to praise. They expected Him to make a shining figure in the world. For, while a Boy, *He increased in wisdom, and stature, and in favour with God and man.** But as He grew up from His twelfth to His thirtieth year, and after, He was not remarkable for any actions which, in the eyes of the world, bore the appearance of manly worth. They were greatly astonished, and laughed at Him, calling Him an useless fellow, an idiot, a nobody, a youth of no sense or spirit. Neither did He apply to any learning,† so that it became a kind of proverb to say, that He was but a grown-up child. And in this way of life He remained so constantly as to fall into general contempt; which was no more than the prophet

* Luke, ii. 52. † *Vid.* John, vii. 15.

said long before in His Person, *I am a worm, and no man.**

You see, then, what our Lord did, in doing nothing; He rendered Himself mean and despicable to all, as I have already said. But does this seem to you to be little? Such a life, indeed, was not needful to Him, but is to me. And, certainly, I know no greater or more difficult practice in all the duties of life than this. They seem to me to have reached the very height of Christian perfection, who are so far advanced as to have overcome the pride of their flesh, truly and unfeignedly consenting to be of no reputation, but even to be accounted vile and worthless. Greater and more glorious is this, according to Solomon, than the conquest of a city. *The patient is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.*† Until you arrive at this point, do not flatter yourself that you have done anything. For, as in truth we are unprofitable servants, even when we have done all, (according to the words of Christ,‡) till we have reached this degree of humility, the truth is not yet in us; we walk in vanity. This the Apostle very plainly tells us; *If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.*§ If then you ask why our Lord Jesus practised this course, I answer you, that it was not on His own account, but for your instruction. And therefore, if we do not profit from so great a lesson, we are inexcusable. For it is detestable to see a worm, and the food of worms, lifting himself up with pride, when the Lord of Majesty vouchsafed to humble Himself so low.

If any one should deem it folly to believe, that our

* Ps. xxii. 6.
† *Vid.* Prov. xvi. 32.
‡ Luke, xvii. 10.
§ Gal. vi. 3.

Lord Jesus led for so long a time what may seem so useless a life, and be rather disposed to say there are many things which the Evangelists have not recorded, and the like; I answer, in the first place, that He was doing what was far from useless, in leaving us a practical example of such exalted virtue; nay, that it was the most useful lesson He could give us, as being the true and sure foundation of all virtues. Secondly, we have His own words in the Gospel of St. John, *When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me; and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me* (that is, in the quality of preachers,) *from the beginning.** And Peter says, at the election of St. Matthias the Apostle, *Of these men, which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John.*†

Jesus Himself began to be about thirty years of age.‡ John had not been His forerunner, had Jesus begun to preach before him. Besides, if He began His ministry sooner, how comes it that He was not known to His neighbours, (who had constant opportunities of seeing Him,) so that they inquired, *Is not this the carpenter's Son?*§ whereas, a very little after, He was called, even by His disciples, (who had but lately become acquainted with Him,) the Son of David? If, then, He had begun sooner, or had done anything remarkable, it would have been recorded, or something of it, at least, would have been hinted in Holy Scripture, nor would all the Evangelists have been thus wholly silent on the subject. This seems

* John, xv. 26.
† Acts, i. 21.
‡ Luke, iii. 23.
§ Matt. xiii. 55.

to be the opinion of St. Bernard, as you shall hear in the following chapter, in the last-cited passage from him. But, however the truth of the matter may be, I cannot but think this a very devout point for meditation. By such a course of life did the Lord Jesus fashion the sword of humility, as He had been addressed by the Prophet; *Gird Thee with Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O Thou most Mighty.** And with no sword could He more suitably slay His adversary, the prince of pride, than with that of humility. For we nowhere read of His having engaged him with the sword of His greatness; but rather the contrary one, even at the time when He seemed to stand most in need of it, the time of His Passion. Hence the same prophet complains to God the Father, in behalf of His Son, saying, *Thou hast taken away the edge of His sword; and givest Him not victory in the battle.*† You see then, how our Lord *began first to do, and then to teach*, designing one day to say, *Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.*‡ This then is what He would first practise; and that not in pretence, but from His heart, for He was truly, and from His heart, lowly and meek. He was incapable of pretence; nay, rather, so deeply did He sink and plunge Himself in humility, and vileness, and contempt, yea, made Himself so entirely of no account in the sight of all men, that even after He began to preach, and to utter His high and heavenly doctrine, and even to confirm it by His miracles and mighty works, they held Him in no estimation, but despised and laughed at Him, saying, *Who is this? Is not this the carpenter's Son?* with other like scornful and contemptuous expressions. In this sense then, it appears how truly the Apostle said, *He emptied Himself, and took upon*

* Ps. xlv. 4. † Ps. lxxxix. 42. ‡ Matt. xi. 29.

*Him the form of a servant.** And not only of a servant, in one sense, by His Incarnation, but of an useless servant, by the lowliness and abject manner of His life.

Would you see then how mightily He girded Himself with this sword? Consider His every action, and you will ever find humility shining in them in all its lustre. You have seen this in all which we have hitherto noticed; recall it then well to mind. And in what follows, observe, that He was so far from neglecting the practice of it, that His humility shines more brightly as His Life proceeds; for He gives us frequent lessons of it to the hour of His Death, and even after death, nay, after His Ascension. Did not He, towards the last, wash His disciples' feet? Was He not beyond expression humbled by the cross He bore on His Divine shoulders? Did He not after His Resurrection, when in a glorified state, call His disciples, brethren? *Go*, says He to Mary Magdalene, *to My brethren.*† And, even after His Ascension, did He not converse familiarly with St. Paul, and as humbly as if he had been His equal? *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?*‡ where He does not call Himself God, but *Me*. And finally, at the great and terrible Day of Judgement, will He not, as He sits on the throne of His Majesty, say, *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me?*§

It was not without reason our Saviour so loved this virtue of humility. He knew that, as pride is the groundwork of all sin, so is humility of all virtue, and the first step to salvation. It is but a tottering edifice that is not built upon the foundation of humility. Trust not, then, to your chastity, to your poverty, or to any other virtue

* *Vid.* Phil. ii. 7.
† John, xx. 17.
‡ Acts, ix. 4.
§ Matt. xxv. 40.

you may possess, except it be joined with humility. Our Lord then it was, who first framed this virtue, that is, shewed how it is to be acquired, namely, by vilifying and lowering oneself in one's own esteem, and in the esteem of all the world, and by the uninterrupted performance of humiliating acts. Go then and do likewise, if you would be perfectly humble; for humility, self-abasement, and the practice of lowly works, and such as degrade us in the eyes of the world, must go before all other virtue. On which St. Bernard says: "Humility, which is obtained by humiliation, is the foundation of the whole spiritual building. For humiliation is as truly the way to humility, as patience is to peace, or reading to knowledge. If you thirst after humility, do not shrink from humiliation, which is the way to it. For if you cannot stoop to humiliation, you will never be able to rise to humility."* And in another place: "Whoever means to raise himself above himself must set out by thinking meanly of himself: lest, soaring above his sphere, he fall beneath it, for want of being perfectly grounded in humility. And, as there is no becoming in reality great, but by the merit of endeavouring to be little; therefore, whoever is desirous of rising to perfection, must restrain himself by humility, that humility may raise him." Wherefore, when you see yourself humbled, rejoice at it; it is a good sign, and a token of approaching grace. For as the heart is exalted before a fall, so before exaltation it is humbled.† You also read, that *God*, at once, *resisteth the proud*, and *giveth grace to the humble*.‡ And a little farther he adds, "It is doing but little to submit to the humiliations which come immediately from God, unless we learn to accept cheerfully such as He is pleased

* Ep. 87. † *Vid.* Prov. xvi. 18. ‡ Jam. iv. 6.

to send us by the means of our fellow-men. Consider a wondrous example of this in holy David, who, when cursed by a servant, was too much under the power of grace to be moved with resentment, and said, *What is there between me and you, ye sons of Zeruiah.** O truly a man after God's own heart, moved rather to indignation against one who avenges himself, than to resentment against one who upbraids! Well might he say with a safe conscience: *If I have rendered to them that repaid me evils,*† and the rest."‡ Let thus much suffice, at present, on the virtue of humility.

And now let us return to the contemplation of the life and actions of Christ, our mirror, and the main object of our regard. Put yourself then, as I have often exhorted you, in the midst of all which relates to Him. And consider that thrice-blessed Family, small indeed in number, but great in dignity, rich in grace and virtue, but poor and humble in their manner of life. The venerable old man, Joseph, sought employment in his lowly trade, as far as his age permitted him to undertake it. Our Lady was diligent at her needle and distaff. She likewise attended to the affairs of her family, which, as you may suppose, were not inconsiderable; preparing food for her spouse and Son, and performing other household duties with her own hands, as she was too poor to have a servant. Feel for her in being thus obliged to work with her own hands; feel also for our Lord Jesus, who, as far as He can, diligently shares with her these labours; for He came *not to be ministered unto, but to minister*, as He Himself says.§ Fancy you see Him busied with His parents in the most servile work of their little dwell-

* *Vid.* 2 Sam. xvi. 10.
† *Vid.* Ps. vii. 4.
‡ Serm. 34, in Cantic.
§ Matt. xx. 28.

ing. Did He not help them in setting out the frugal board, arranging the simple sleeping-rooms, nay, and in other yet humbler offices? Consider Him attentively, as He dutifully performs these lowly household duties, and forget not His blessed Mother. Contemplate Him too, day after day, seated at table with His Mother and her holy spouse; at no rich and refined banquet, but at a poor and moderate repast. See, how, when the meal is over, they discourse sweetly, not on vain and idle topics, but in words full of wisdom and of the Holy Ghost, refreshing themselves not less in mind than in body. And then all retire to prayer, each to their separate chambers; our blessed Lady to her's, St. Joseph to his, and our Saviour to His; for their dwelling is but a little one. Follow them into their apartments, and behold our Lord, His evening prayer over, composing Himself to sleep on the ground, so humbly and in such mean fashion, and this night after night. O Thou hidden God, why dost Thou thus continually afflict that most immaculate Body? One night of such weary watching had sufficed to redeem a world! But it was Thy boundless love which prompted Thee to this; very zealous wert Thou for the lost sheep Thou desiredst to bear on Thy shoulders to the heavenly pastures! Must Thou, O King of kings, Eternal God, Who suppliest the wants of all with such provident care, in such abundant measure, must Thou Thyself be subject to poverty and hardship? Is it for Thyself Thou hast reserved this cruel discipline of fasting and watching, and all those other acts of mortification, and that for so long a time? Where then are the seekers of bodily comfort, the buyers of curious and vain ornaments? It was not in Thy school that we learned these lessons. What! are we wiser than He? He has taught us both by word and example, humility, poverty, morti-

fication of the flesh, and exercise of the body: let us then follow our Sovereign Master, who neither will deceive us, nor can Himself be deceived; and, according to the Apostle's advice, *having food and raiment, let us be therewith content;** and this not in superfluous measure, but so as to serve the ends of necessity; at the same time, carefully and constantly attending to the spiritual study and practice of all other Christian virtues.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD.

Our Lord Jesus having now lived in this painful and abject manner till He was full twenty-nine years old, on entering His thirtieth year, said to His Mother, "The time is now come for Me to go forth and glorify God, and manifest My Father, by appearing in the world, and working the salvation of man, for which He sent Me hither. Be of good heart, therefore, O beloved Mother, for I will soon return to you." Then kneeling to her, as her Son, the great Master of Humility asks and receives her blessing. And she in like manner kneeling to Him, as God, receives His blessing, and embracing Him, with tears, thus says to Him most tenderly: "Go, blessed Son, go with the blessing of Your Divine Father and mine; be mindful of me, and hasten to return and comfort me." Thus, then, the blessed Jesus, reverently taking leave of His Mother, and His foster-father Joseph, sets out from Nazareth towards Jerusalem by the way

* 1 Tim. vi. 8.

of Jordan, where John was baptizing, at a place eighteen leagues from Jerusalem. Thus the Lord of the world proceeds alone, for as yet He had no disciples. View Him, then, attentively, as in the presence of God, and see Him travelling alone, and barefooted, through a long and rugged road, and deeply condole with Him. O Lord, whither art Thou going, and by what ways? Art Thou not the Sovereign of all the kings of the earth? Where, then, O Lord, are Your barons and counts, Your captains and soldiers, Your horses and camels, Your elephants and chariots, Your heralds, attendants, and thronging retinue? Where are Your guards, such as other monarchs are wont to have to keep off the populace from approaching too near Your sacred Person? Where are the trumpets, the instruments, and royal ensigns? What couriers go before to prepare a palace for Your reception? Where are all the honours paid to us, worms of this world? Are not the heavens and the earth, O Lord, full of Thy glory? Why, then, dost Thou proceed thus inglorious? Art not Thou He to Whom *thousand thousands ministered* in Thy Kingdom, *and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before* Thee? * Why, then, dost Thou thus travel alone, on foot, nay, barefooted? But, ah! the cause is plain; Thou art not now in Thy Kingdom; *for Thy Kingdom is not of this world.*† *Thou hast made Thyself of no reputation*, by taking *upon Thee the form of a servant*, and not of a king.‡ Thou art become as one of us, *a stranger and a sojourner, as all* our *fathers were.*§ Thou hast been made a slave, that we may be made kings. Thou hast come to conduct us to Thine own Kingdom, by placing before our eyes the way by which we may ascend thither. But why do we neglect it? Why do we not

* Dan. vii. 10.

† *Vid.* John, xviii. 36.

‡ *Vid.* Phil. ii. 7.

§ Ps. xxxix. 14.

follow Thee? Why do we not humble ourselves? Why do we so greedily seek and grasp honours and pomps, the perishing and empty things of the world. It must surely be because our kingdom is of this world, and that we do not consider ourselves as pilgrims here, and therefore run into all these evils. O senseless sons of men, why do we prefer and so earnestly embrace the empty for the true, the perishing for the firm and sure, the temporal for the eternal? Assuredly, good Lord, did we but steadily consider that we are but strangers and sojourners, we should readily follow Thee, and, taking of these visible things merely what is necessary, we should not be stopped in running after Thee in the odour of Thy ointments.* For we should be free from every weight, and should regard these fleeting things as already past, and should lightly despise them. Thus, then, our Lord Jesus humbly travels on some days' journey, till He reaches the Jordan.

When He arrived at it, He there found John baptizing sinners, and a great multitude of people, who had flocked thither to hear his preaching; for they regarded him as the Christ. The Lord Jesus therefore saith to him: "I entreat you to baptize Me with these." John looking stedfastly on Him, and knowing Him in spirit, with fear and reverence answered, *Lord, I have need to be baptized of Thee.*† To whom our Lord Jesus answered, "*Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.* ‡ Forbear to tell this now, and do not make Me known, for My time is not yet come; but baptize Me. For now is the time of humility, and therefore will I fulfil all humility."

Do you then also attend here to humility, for this is

* *Vid.* Cant. 1. 3. † Matt. iii. 14. ‡ Ib. 15.

the place to treat of it; and you ought to know, as the commentary upon this passage says, that humility has three degrees. The first is, to be subject to those above us, and not to prefer ourselves to those who are equal to us. The second is, to subject ourselves to our equals, and not to prefer ourselves to our inferiors. The third and most perfect is, to place ourselves beneath our inferiors. This is the degree Christ practised on this occasion, and therefore He fulfilled all humility. You may hence observe how Christ advanced in humility, by comparing this with the foregoing chapter. For here He places Himself beneath His own servant; He makes Himself vile, and justifies and extols His servant. But consider in another point how His humility has increased. For hitherto He has conversed humbly among men, as an useless and abject person; here He would also appear a sinner. For it was to sinners that John preached repentance, and baptized them; and amongst them, and in their presence, would our Lord Jesus be baptized. And on this point says St. Bernard: "He came with the crowd to the baptism of John. He came as one of the sinful multitude, though, in fact, the only One exempt from sin. Who would think Him to be the Son of God? Who would think Him to be the Lord of Majesty? Mightily indeed dost Thou humble Thyself, O Lord; too deeply dost Thou hide Thyself. But thou canst not be concealed from John."* Thus far St. Bernard. The same also might be said of His Circumcision, for there also would He appear as a sinner: yet here more so, for here it was in the presence of a crowd publicly, there in private. But, was there not reason to fear on this occasion, lest, greatly wishing, as He did, to go forth to preach, He

* Serm. 1, in Epiph.

should be despised as a sinner? Yet, not on this account would the great Master of humility lose this opportunity of most profoundly humbling Himself. It was His wish, therefore, to appear what He was not, that He might gain contempt and self-humiliation, even with a view to instruct us; we wish on the contrary to appear what we are not, to our own praise and glory. For if there seems to be any good in us, we display it; but we cover our defects, though ever so sinful and wicked. What sort of humility then is ours? Hear on this point, not me, but St. Bernard, who says; "There is a humility, which is produced and enkindled by charity; and there is a humility, which is engendered by truth, and is void of all warmth. The latter consists in knowledge, the former in affection. For if you look inwardly at yourself by the light of truth, and without self-deceit, and are not influenced in your judgment by flattery, I doubt not but you will be humbled, and will become more vile in your own eyes, from this true knowledge of yourself; though you may not perhaps as yet bear to appear so in the eyes of others. By these means you will be humble indeed by the operation of truth, but not by the infusion of charity. For had you been as deeply affected by the love of truth, or enlightened by the splendour of that which has so faithfully and healthfully shown you to yourself; you would doubtless have been willing, as far as in you lies, that all should hold the same opinion of you, which you know is held by the truth within you. I say, as far as in you lies, for generally it is not advisable that all should be made acquainted with every thing which we know of ourselves; and by the very charity of truth, and the truth of charity, we are forbidden to reveal what may do harm to those who know it. Otherwise, if influenced only by personal feelings of self-love, you thus keep concealed

within yourself the judgment of truth, who can doubt that you have a less regard for truth than for yourself, since you prefer to it your own convenience or honour?" And afterwards he adds; "If you are now really humbled in yourself by that necessary humility, which the truth that trieth the very heart and reins forces upon the senses of the watchful soul, add the humility of the will to it, and make a virtue of necessity, for there is no true virtue without the consent of the will. And this you will prove, if you are unwilling to appear otherwise outwardly than you find yourself inwardly. Else, you have reason to fear lest the words of the Psalmist be applicable to yourself; *He flattereth himself in his own sight until his abominable sin be found out.** *Divers weights and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the Lord.*† What! do you depreciate yourself in secret by yourself when weighed in the balance of Truth, and, valuing yourself in the eyes of others at another price, do you sell yourself to us at a higher rate than you have received from her? Fear God, and be not guilty of so great a wickedness, as to be exalted by your own will when you are humbled by the truth. For this is to resist the truth, this is to fight against God. But choose rather to acquiesce in God, and let your will be subjected to truth, and not only subjected, but devoted. *My soul*, says David, *truly waiteth still upon God.*‡ But it is little to be subject to God, unless you are also subject to every human creature for His sake. I say more, be subject to your equals, be subject also to your inferiors. *For thus it becometh us,* says our Lord, *to fulfil all righteousness.*§ Do you also go to your inferior if you would be perfect in

* Ps. xxxvi. 2.
† Prov. xx. 10.
‡ Ps. lxii. 1.
§ Matt. iii. 15.

righteousness, defer to your inferior, humbly stoop to those beneath you." Thus far St. Bernard. He also says: "Who is righteous, but he that is truly humble? For when the Lord stooped to the hands of His servant, the Baptist, and he was awed at His majesty; *Suffer it*, He said, *to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness,** thus placing the consummation of perfect righteousness in the perfection of humility. The humble therefore is righteous."† Thus far St. Bernard. But this righteousness appears herein in the humble, because he renders to every one his right; he takes not what belongs to another, but gives honour to God, and retains vileness to himself. But this you will understand better, if you consider the injustice of the proud, who attributes to himself the good things of the Lord. Of whom St. Bernard again thus speaks; "Evils frequently take their rise from the greatest good; thus, when exalted by the good gifts of the Lord, we use them as if they were not given to us, and neglect to give God the glory, we who seemed to be greatest, on account of the grace which we had received, are esteemed least in the sight of God for neglecting to acknowledge it. But I spare you. I have used the milder terms, 'greatest' and 'least,' but I have not expressed what I mean. I have veiled the distinction; I will myself lay it openly before you. I ought to have said 'very good' and 'very wicked.' For, truly and without doubt, any one is so much the more wicked in proportion as he has attained to greater goodness, if he ascribes this goodness to himself. For this is the height of wickedness. But if any say: Far be this from me, I acknowledge *by the grace of God I am what I am*,‡ and at the same time studiously desire glory for the grace

* Matt. iii. 15. † Serm. 47, in Cant. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 10.

which he has received, is he not a thief and a robber? Let such an one hear the words; *Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant.** What can be more wicked than a servant who usurps to himself the glory of his Lord?"† Thus far St. Bernard. You see how the perfection of righteousness consists in humility, and how it robs not God of His honour, nor attributes to itself what it ought not. Nor assuredly will the humble injure his neighbour. For he judges him not, nor does he prefer himself to any one, but regards himself as less than all, and chooses for himself the lowest place. On this subject St. Bernard again thus speaks; "How knowest thou, O man, but that he whom perhaps of all thou countest to be most vile and wretched, from whose life thou shrinkest as most wicked, and singularly foul, and therefore thinkest that he should be despised, not only in comparison with thyself, who perhaps trustest that thou art living soberly, justly, and piously, but even in comparison with all other wicked men, as the most wicked of all; how knowest thou, I say, but that he shall be made by an inward change of the right hand of the Most High, nay, that in the counsels of God he is already, better both than thyself and them? And therefore our Lord would not have us choose a place moderately low, nor even the last but one, nay, not even one among the very last; but *Go and sit down,* saith He, *in the lowest room,*‡ that thou mayest sit alone, that is, the last of all, and not presume, I say not, to prefer thyself, but even to compare thyself to any."§

Many are the places in which this virtue of humility is commended by the same St. Bernard. He says

* Luke, xix. 22.
† Serm. 84, in Cant.
‡ Luke, xiv. 10.
§ Serm. 37, in Cant.

again, "A great and lofty virtue is humility, which earns for us what is not given by teaching; worthy to receive what cannot be gained by learning; worthy to conceive of the WORD, and by the WORD, mysteries which cannot be explained in words. And why so? Not because of merit; but because it has thus seemed good in the sight of the Father of the WORD, the Spouse of the soul, JESUS CHRIST, our Lord, Who is over all GOD, blessed for ever."* Again; "Humility is a virtue, by which man, through a perfect knowledge of himself, becomes vile in his own eyes."† Again; "The virtue of humility alone can repair the crime of a breach of charity."‡ Again; "Humility alone is unaccustomed to boasting, a stranger to pride, not given to contention. He that is truly humble contends not in judgment with God, nor advances the plea of righteousness."§ Moreover, humility reconciles us to God, and renders us pleasing to Him. Again; "Humility is ever a favourite virtue with Divine Grace."‖ For, in order to preserve humility, it is ever customary with Divine Love so to ordain, that in proportion as any advances, so much the less advance does he think himself to have made. For even to the last stage of this spiritual course, whatever advance any may have made, he will still retain somewhat of the imperfection which belonged to the first, so that he will seem to himself scarcely to have reached even that. Again; "Beautiful is the union of virginity and humility, and highly pleasing is that soul to God wherein humility recommends virginity, and virginity adorns humility. But of how great veneration must you think her

* Serm. 85, in Cant. ad fin.
† De grad. humil. c. 1.
‡ Serm. 2, in Nat. Dom.
§ De Offic. Episcop. post med.
‖ Serm. iv. super Missus est.

worthy, in whom humility is exalted by fruitfulness, and virginity consecrated by travail. You are told that she is a virgin, you are told that she is humble; if you cannot imitate the virginity of the humble one, imitate the humility of the virgin. A praiseworthy virtue is virginity, but more necessary is humility. The one is of counsel, the other of precept. To the one you are invited; to the other you are obliged. Of the one it is said, *He that is able to receive it, let him receive it;** of the other, *Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*† The one, then, is rewarded; the other exacted. In short, without virginity you can be saved, without humility you cannot. It is possible, I say, for humility to be pleasing, which bewails the loss of virginity; but without humility, (I presume to say,) not even would the virginity of Mary have been pleasing. Upon whom, He says, shall My Spirit rest, except upon the humble and quiet?‡ Had Mary, then, not been humble, the Holy Ghost would not have rested upon her; and had He not rested upon her, neither would He have given her power of bearing. For how without Him could she have conceived of Him? It is manifest, then, that in order to her conceiving of the Holy Ghost, as she herself declares, *God regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden,*§ rather than her virginity. And if by her virginity she was pleasing, yet by her humility she conceived. Whence it appears, that her humility without doubt was the cause why her virginity was pleasing. What sayest thou, who art a virgin and yet proud? Mary forgets that she is a virgin, and glories in her humility; and dost thou neglect humility, and

* Matt. xix. 12.
† Ib. xviii. 3.
‡ *Vid.* Is. lxvi. 2.
§ *Vid.* Luke, i. 48.

flatter thyself upon thy virginity? *He regarded,* she says, *the lowliness of His handmaiden.* And who is she? A Virgin holy, a Virgin sober, a Virgin devout. Art thou more chaste than she?—more devout? Or thy modesty, is it perchance more pleasing than Mary's chastity, that thou, forsooth, without humility, shouldest avail to please by thine, as she could not by hers? In short, the more honourable thou art by this singular gift of chastity, the more dost thou wrong thyself in sullying its beauty within thee by the admixture of pride."* Again; "Charity, chastity, and humility are void of colour, indeed, but not of beauty; and no common beauty is that which can give pleasure even to the eye of God. What more lovely than chastity, which makes a clean thing of one conceived of unclean seed, of a foe a friend, in short, of a man an Angel? The Angel and the chaste man differ indeed from each other, but in happiness, not in virtue. And if the chastity of the one is attended with more happiness, that of the other is manifestly stronger. It is chastity alone which in this scene and period of mortality represents in some measure the state of immortality and glory. Chastity alone, amidst the solemnity of nuptials, claims to itself the character of that blessed country, in which they neither marry nor are given in marriage, imparting already in some measure a foretaste of that heavenly conversation. It keeps meanwhile in sanctity this frail vessel which we bear about with us, and in which we are frequently endangered, like that fragrant balsam in which embalmed bodies are preserved free from corruption. It curbs the senses, and nerves the limbs, and prevents their being dissolved in ease, or polluted by irregular desires, or cor-

* Serm. i. super Missus est.

rupted by the pleasures of the flesh." And shortly afterwards; "But, whatever be the beauty with which chastity appears thus pre-eminently adorned, yet without charity it has neither value nor merit. And no wonder. For what good can we receive without it? Faith? No, not even though it should remove mountains. Knowledge? Not even though it speak with the tongues of Angels. Martyrdom? No, not even though, as the Apostle says, I give my body to be burned.* Neither without it is any good received, nor with it is any offering, however small, rejected. Chastity without charity is a lamp without oil. Take away the oil, the lamp no longer gives its light. Take away charity, chastity loses its power to please." And some way afterwards, about the middle of the letter; "Of the three which we have proposed, I will now treat of humility alone, which is so necessary to the two foregoing virtues, that without it they do not seem even to be virtues. For it is humility which earns for us either chastity or charity. For *God giveth grace unto the humble.*† Humility also preserves the virtues which we receive; for His Spirit will not rest except upon the quiet and humble.‡ As it preserves them, so does it perfect them; for virtue is made perfect in weakness, that is, in humility. It subdues that enemy of all grace, and beginning of every sin, pride; and rids both itself and other virtues of its insolent tyranny. For whilst other good things have the effect of giving an increase of strength to pride; this alone, as a bulwark and fortress of all virtues, powerfully resists its malice, and withstands its presumption."§ Thus far St. Bernard. You have heard then many and beautiful things about

* 1 Cor. xiii. 3.
† James, iv. 6.
‡ *Vid.* Is. lxvi. 2.
§ De Officio Episcop.

Humility in the present chapter from the most truth-loving and humble Bernard. Endeavour likewise to comprehend, and carry out in practice, what he says on the subject of other virtues. But let us now return to the Baptism of our Lord.

When John saw, then, that it was the will of our Lord, he obeyed, and baptized Him. Now, therefore, regard Him well. For the Lord of Majesty humbly unclothes Himself, like any ordinary man, and is immersed in the cold water, at a season of excessive rigour; for the love of us He works our salvation, instituting the Sacrament of Baptism, and washing away our sins. Thus does He espouse to Himself the whole Church, and in a particular manner all the souls of the faithful. For by the faith which we promise Him in baptism we are truly wedded to our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Prophet says in His Person, *I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness.** Whence this action is a great and solemn mystery, and highly profitable to mankind. And therefore the Church sings; "This day the Church is united to her heavenly Spouse, for in Jordan Christ has washed away her sins."† And in this most excellent work the Whole Blessed Trinity manifested Itself in a special manner; *for the Spirit of God descended like a dove, and lighted upon Him; and lo, a Voice from heaven saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*‡ Upon this passage St. Bernard says, "*Hear ye Him,*§ He saith; Behold, then, Lord Jesus, begin now at least to speak; Thou hast permission to speak from Thy Father. How long, O Power of God and Wisdom of God, how

* Hosea, ii. 20.

† This forms part of the Antiphon at the *Benedictus* in the Office for the Epiphany.

‡ *Vid.* Matt. iii. 16, 17.

§ Matt. xvii. 5.

long wilt Thou lie concealed among the people, like some weak and foolish man? How long, O noble King, and King of heaven, wilt Thou allow Thyself to be called and to be thought the carpenter's son? For Luke the Evangelist witnesses that He was still supposed to be the son of Joseph.* O Humility of Christ, how dost thou confound the pride of my vanity! I scarce know anything, and yet flatter myself that I know much, and can no longer keep silence. For, losing all modesty and discretion, I thrust myself forward, and am full of vain boasting, ever ready to speak, swift to teach, slow to hear. And Christ, whilst He remained silent so long a time, and concealed Himself, was it that He dreaded vain-glory? What should He fear from vain-glory, who is the true Glory of the Father? He feared indeed, but not for Himself. It was for us He feared, well knowing what good reasons we had to be afraid. For us He was careful; us He instructed; He kept silence in words, but instructed us by His works, and what He taught afterwards in word, He proclaimed already by His example; *Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.*† For of the infancy of our Lord I hear scarcely anything; from that time to this His thirtieth year I find nothing. But now He can no longer lie hid, since He is thus publicly declared by His Father."‡ Thus far St. Bernard. And this is the authority which I appealed to in the former chapter, from which you learn how our Lord Jesus remained humbly silent for our instruction. You see, then, how His Life is everywhere fragrant with the odour of humility. It is a pleasure to me to speak to you of it; for it is a singularly noble virtue, and one of which we stand greatly in need; and our earnestness in seeking it, and our affection

* Luke, iii. 23. † Matt. xi. 29. ‡ Serm. 1, in Epiph.

in loving it, ought to be so much the stronger, as our Lord in all His actions was so signally desirous of practising it.

CHAPTER XIV.

OUR LORD IN THE WILDERNESS.

As soon as our Lord Jesus was baptized, He straightway went into the wilderness to a mountain called Quarantain, about four leagues distant, and there fasted forty days and forty nights, and, according to St. Mark, *was there with the wild beasts.** Here then consider Him, and regard Him attentively; for many are the virtues of which He affords you an example. He passes His time in solitude; He fasts, prays, and watches; He lies and sleeps upon the bare ground, and has no other society than the humble company of the beasts. Compassionate Him then, for though on all occasions, and in every instance, His life was one of pain and bodily suffering, yet most particularly was it so at this time; and learn of Him by His example to discipline yourself in these exercises. For there are four things to be here remarked, which relate to the spiritual exercise of the soul, and wondrously assist each other, namely, retirement, fasting, prayer, and mortification of the body. And it is by these principally that we attain to that purity of heart which is so ardently to be desired, inasmuch as it contains all virtues in a manner within itself. For it includes charity, humi-

* Mark, i. 13.

lity, patience, and the other virtues, together with a freedom from all vices; for purity of heart ceases to exist where there is vice, or a decay of virtue. And therefore we are told in the Conferences of the Holy Fathers of the desert, that the whole object of spiritual exercises is the attainment of purity of heart; for this it is by which man earns the sight of God, as our Lord says in the Gospel; *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.** And, according to St. Bernard, the purer any is, the nearer he is to God. To be perfectly pure is to have attained. Now, to gain this purity of heart, of great service is fervent and assiduous prayer, concerning which you shall be instructed more fully below. But prayer, accompanied with surfeiting and gluttony, or with a delicate treatment of the body, or sloth, is of little service. And therefore fasting is necessary, and mortification of the body, but with discretion; for indiscretion is the bane of every good action. Besides, for the perfect use of all these before-mentioned means, retirement appears to be necessary; for it does not seem possible for prayer to be performed as it should be in the midst of bustle and noise; and we can scarcely be in the way of seeing and hearing much, without offence and injury to purity of heart. *For death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our souls;*† and therefore, after the example of our Lord, enter into the wilderness, that is, as far as you can, separate yourself from the company of others, and be retired, if you would be united with Him, and see Him by purity of heart. Avoid also useless talking, and particularly with worldly persons. Do not seek to entangle yourself in new ties and friendships. Shut your eyes and ears to vain and fleeting ob-

* Matt. v. 8. † *Vid.* Jer. ix. 21.

jects; and fly in particular, as the most destructive poison to the soul, everything which can disturb its quiet and tranquillity. For it was not without reason that the holy Fathers made choice, for their habitation, of woods, and other spots most retired from all conversation with mankind; and recommended those who continued to live in religious societies to be blind and deaf and dumb. But that you may the better understand this, hear what St. Bernard says on the subject; "Do thou, who art urged to enjoy the sweet motions of the Holy Spirit, and art enkindled by the desire of preparing thy soul to be the spouse of God, sit solitary, in the words of the prophet,* and thou hast raised thyself above thyself by the bare desire of espousing the Lord of Angels. Is it not, indeed, above thee to cleave to God, and to be of one spirit with Him? Sit down, therefore, solitary as the dove, have thou nothing to do with the crowds, nothing with the multitude of mankind; forget also thine own people and thy father's house, and let the King be desirous of thy beauty.† Be thou alone, O devout soul! that thou mayest keep thyself wholly for Him, whom thou hast wholly chosen to thyself. Withdraw from the public, withdraw from thine own household, withdraw from thy most intimate friends, and even from thy necessary attendants. Knowest thou not that thy Spouse is bashful and reserved, and that it liketh Him not well to indulge thee with His company in the presence of others? Withdraw then, yet rather in mind than body; withdraw, but let it be in intention, in spirit, and with devotion. For Christ thy Lord, who is present with thee, is so in spirit, and He claims of thee retirement of the spirit rather than of the body. Though, indeed, it

* *Vid.* Lam. iii. 28.

† Ps. xlv. 10.

will be useful for thee to withdraw thyself in person also at times, if thou canst do so seasonably; especially at the time of prayer." And again; "You are truly alone, if your thoughts are not abroad, if you are not taken up with things about you, if you despise what the world prizes, if you have a distaste for what the world longs after, if you shun disputes, if you are insensible to ill-usage, and forget injuries; otherwise, however complete your bodily solitude may be, you are far from being truly alone. Do you not see that it is possible for you to be retired, even in a crowd; and in a tumult, even when alone? Thus then, however great the number of persons you converse with, you may still be alone, if you will but refrain from curious searching into their conversation, or rashly setting up for a judge of it."* Thus far St. Bernard. You see then how necessary is retirement, and how useless is that of the body, if unaccompanied by that of the mind; but it must be remembered that complete bodily retirement is of the greatest service, that the mind may not be dissipated by outward objects, but may be able to recollect itself in company with its Spouse. Endeavour then with your whole affection, and with all your power, to imitate our Lord Jesus in retirement, and prayer, and fasting, and discreet bodily mortification.

Learn, likewise, from His conversing with the wild beasts, to behave yourself humbly towards all, and to bear patiently with them, even with those who seem to you at times to conduct themselves like creatures devoid of reason. Frequently visit our Lord in this His retirement. Regard Him, and observe how He converses there, and chiefly how He lies at night upon the ground.

* Serm. 40, in Cant. ad fin.

For every faithful soul ought thus to visit Him once at least every day, principally from Epiphany to the end of His forty days' retreat. Now, at the end of the forty days, our Lord was an hungred.* Then it was that the Tempter came to Him, wishing to discover whether He were the Son of God; and first he tempted Him to gluttony, saying; *If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.*† But he could not deceive the Master of wisdom, who gave him such a reply, and so conducted Himself, as neither to yield to the temptation, nor to enable the adversary to learn what he wished. For He neither denied nor asserted Himself to be the Son of God, but convicted him by the authority of Scripture. And mark here, from the example of our Lord, the duty of resisting gluttony; for we must begin with that if we wish to overcome vice. For it appears that whoever yields to the dominion of gluttony is rendered too weak to conquer any other vice. For thus says the gloss upon this passage in St. Matthew; "Unless gluttony be first subdued, it is in vain to struggle against other vices." Next, the devil took Him up, and carried Him to Jerusalem, distant from thence about eight or ten leagues. The distances of these places, which I have frequent occasion to notice in this little work, I have heard from persons who have been in those parts. Consider here the meekness and patience of our Lord. For He allowed Himself to be carried and handled by that beast of blood, who thirsted for His own Blood, and that of all His faithful followers.

Taking Him then upon a pinnacle of the Temple, he tempted Him to vain-glory, wishing in like manner as above to discover whether He were the Son of God; but

* Matt. iv. 2. † Ib. 3.

here again he is confounded by the authority of Scripture, and is foiled in his purpose. Hereupon then, according to St. Bernard, as our Lord had manifested nothing of His Divinity, the Enemy supposed Him to be mere man, and tempted Him the third time as such.* Next then he took Him up, and carried Him into an high mountain, about two leagues distant from Mount Quarantain. And here he tempted Him to avarice; but again was the murderer baffled. You have seen how our Lord Jesus was dealt with and tempted; are you astonished, then, if we are tempted? Many other were the occasions on which He endured temptations. Whence St. Bernard says;† They who reckon only three temptations of our Lord, show their ignorance of Scripture, which says, *The life of man upon earth is a warfare.*‡ The Apostle also says, that *He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*§ His victory then completed, Angels came and ministered to Him. Here now attend diligently, and view our Lord as He is eating, Angels alone standing around, and consider well all that follows, for it is very beautiful, and will minister highly to devotion. And what, I ask, did the Angels minister to Him to eat after so long a fast? Of this Scripture makes no mention. We may therefore imagine this victorious banquet accordingly as our devotion may suggest. And, indeed, if we consider but His power, the question is solved; for He could create at will whatever He pleased, and have whatever He would of things created. But we do not find that He used this power either for Himself, or for His disciples; but He did for the multitude, whom He

* Serm. 1, in Die Sancto Pasch.

† *Vid.* Serm. 14, in Ps. Qui habitat.

‡ *Vid.* Job, vii. 1. Militia est vita hominis super terram. Vulg.

§ Heb. iv. 15.

fed upon two occasions, in great numbers, with a few loaves.* But we read of His disciples, that in His presence they plucked the ears of corn for hunger, and eat them.† In like manner, when, wearied with His journey, He sat upon the well talking with the woman of Samaria, we are not told that He created food, but that He sent His disciples into the city to buy it. Nor is it probable that He was fed in the desert by any miracle; for He wrought His miracles for the edification of others, and in the presence of multitudes. But here were none present but Angels; what course, then, shall our meditations take on the present subject? Here was no human dwelling nor any food prepared, but the Angels conveyed to Him food which had been prepared elsewhere, as was the case with Daniel. For the prophet Habbakuk having made pottage for his reapers, the Angel of the Lord carried him by the hair of his head from Judea to Babylon to Daniel, that he might eat, and afterwards in a moment carried him back.‡ Let us dwell here awhile, and make choice of this for our meditation, and delight ourselves with our Lord at this His banquet. For we may thus piously and devoutly meditate. As soon as Satan has been repulsed, the Angels flock in numbers to our Lord Jesus Christ, and prostrate on the ground adore Him, saying; "Hail, Lord Jesus, our Lord and our God." And our Lord humbly and benignly raises them, inclining His head, as the Son of Man, who was made a little lower than the Angels. The Angels say to Him, "Lord, Thou hast fasted long; what wilt Thou that we prepare for Thee?" To whom He replies, "Go to My dearest Mother, and

* Matt. xiv. 15; xv. 32. John, vi. 5.

† Matt. xii. 1.

‡ Bel and the Dragon, v. 33.

if she have anything at hand, bear it to Me; for of no food do I partake so gladly as of that which she prepares." Then two of the number set out, and in a moment are with her. They respectfully salute her, and, having acquitted themselves of their embassy, bring a mess of pottage, which she had got ready for herself and St. Joseph, and a piece of bread, with a linen cloth and other necessaries; perhaps, too, our Lady procured, if she could, a small fish or two. Then they return, bearing the repast in their hands; and, spreading it on the ground, pronounce in due form the solemn words of benediction. Here consider Him attentively in each of His actions. How composedly He sits on the ground, and with what studious regard to every minute propriety He comports Himself, and how temperately He partakes of the food. The Angels stand around, ministering to their Lord. One serves Him with bread, another with wine, another prepares the fish, and others sing some of the songs of Sion, and rejoice with gladness and festivity before Him. This festival, however, if it may be said, was united with the deepest compassion, which should move us also to mourn. For reverently do they look upon Him, and, as they regard Him their God and Lord, and Creator of the whole world, *who giveth food to all flesh*,* thus humbled, and in need of the support of bodily food, and eating as other men, they are moved with compassion. Well may you then cry out and say; O Lord, what great things hast Thou done, all Thy works are full of wonder; assist me, that I may suffer somewhat for Thee, who hast endured so many and such great sufferings for me. Assuredly this alone should inflame you with a great love for Him.

* Ps. cxxxvi. 25.

The repast ended, the Angels return to their country, where they accomplish His commands, and fill the whole court of heaven with joy at the news of the victory which He had won. But our Lord Jesus, wishing to return to His Mother, began to descend the mountain. Again regard Him well, how the Lord of all goes on His way alone barefooted, and deeply compassionate Him. On His arriving at the Jordan, John saw Him coming to him, and pointed Him out, saying; *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world;** this is He upon whom I saw the Holy Spirit resting, when I baptized Him. And another day also, when he saw Him walking near the Jordan, he said, in like manner; *Behold the Lamb of God.* Then Andrew, and also another of John's disciples, went after Jesus. The loving Lord, thirsting for their salvation, to give them confidence in Himself, turned and said; *What seek ye?* They said; *Master, where dwellest Thou?* Hereupon He led them to the house, to which He had retired in those parts, and they remained with Him the whole day. After this, Andrew brought with him his brother Peter, whom Jesus courteously and readily received; for He knew what He designed him to be. And He said to him; *Thou shalt be called Cephas;* and thus our Lord became in some manner known to them, and indeed intimate with them. Afterwards our Lord Jesus, wishing to return into Galilee to His Mother, left those parts, and entered upon His journey. Again regard Him with compassion, and ever accompany Him, for He goes alone as He is wont to do, barefooted, through so long a road of fourteen leagues. When He returned home, His Mother arose to meet Him with inexpressible joy, and re-

* John, i. 29.

ceived Him in her arms with the fondest embraces; and He, in turn, reverently inclined to her, as her Son, and also to His foster-father Joseph, and abode with them as He used to do.

CHAPTER XV.

OUR LORD OPENS THE BOOK IN THE SYNAGOGUE.

Thus far, by the grace of God, we have treated in order the passages of the Life of our Lord Jesus, and have omitted little or nothing of all that happened to Him, or was done by Him; but from this point I do not intend pursuing the same plan. For it would lead us into too great length to reduce to meditations everything He said and did, particularly as it should be our chief concern, after the example of blessed Cecilia, ever to carry the facts of our Lord's Life in the secret depths of our hearts. Let us collect, then, some of His actions, and employ ourselves in meditating assiduously upon them, up to the time of His Passion; for from that point nothing ought to be omitted. Neither ought we elsewhere to pass by anything wholly, or to neglect meditating upon it in its proper place and time. But I do not intend henceforward to treat these meditations at so great a length, except in a very few cases. For it is sufficient that you place His bare action or saying before the eyes of your mind, and converse and thus grow into familiarity with Him. For in this seems to consist the chief sweetness, and devout effect, and in a manner the whole fruit, of these meditations; that everywhere, and on all occasions,

you devoutly contemplate Him in some one action of His; as, when He is with His disciples, and when with sinners; when He speaks to them, when He preaches to the multitude, when He is walking, and when sitting; when sleeping, and when awake; when He is eating, and when ministering to others; when He is healing the sick, and when He works other miracles. In these, and suchlike circumstances, consider all His gestures, but especially contemplate His face, if you can bring it to your imagination, which appears to me more difficult than anything which I have spoken of before. Consider also attentively, whether He looks graciously upon you. Let what has been said in this chapter serve you for instruction upon all which follows; and wherever I relate anything, if I do not expressly treat the meditations in a different way, or if I leave them out, recur to this place, and it will suffice for all you require. But let us now proceed to the remaining part of His blessed Life.

After our Lord Jesus had returned from His Baptism, the Master of Humility continued His humble conversation as He had been used to do; He began, however, by degrees to manifest Himself to some, by teaching and preaching privately. For He is not said to have undertaken His public preaching during the whole of the following year; that is, not till the miracle which He wrought at the marriage, and which took place on the same day as His Baptism the year before. And although He occasionally preached, and His disciples baptized, yet He did not either Himself, or by His disciples, attend to preaching before the imprisonment of John, as He did afterwards; giving us in this an example of amazing humility, in deferring, as may be piously gathered or imagined from what we have seen before, to John, who

was so infinitely His inferior in preaching. He did not begin His ministry with noise and pomp, but humbly, and by degrees.

One Sabbath-day, then, being in the synagogue with the Jews, He stood up to read in the book of Isaiah, and found the place where it was written; *The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor.** Then, when He had closed the book, He said, *This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.* Regard Him, then, how humbly He takes upon Him the office of reader, and reads before them, and expounds the Scripture, with a benign and serene countenance, and how humbly He begins to manifest Himself to them, saying; *This day is the Scripture fulfilled;* that is, I am He, of whom the Prophet speaks. And the eyes of all were fastened upon Him, on account of the Divine power of His words, and His humble and lovely aspect; for He was indeed most beautiful, and inexpressibly powerful in speech. Of both of which the Prophet had thus spoken; *Thou art fairer than the children of men, full of grace are Thy lips.*†

CHAPTER XVI.

OF OUR LORD'S CALLING HIS DISCIPLES.

Our Lord Jesus began also to call His disciples, and to labour for our salvation, still preserving His former humility. Peter and Andrew He called at three different

* Luke, iv. 16, 17, 18. *Vid.* Is. lxi. 1. † Ps. xlv. 3.

times. The first was that, which we spoke of above, when He was at the Jordan, and when they became a little acquainted with Him.* The second was from the ship, at the miraculous draught of fishes, as St. Luke relates.† Then they followed Him, but with a design of returning home. They began, however, to hear His doctrine. The third was likewise from the ship, as St. Matthew relates, upon which occasion He said to them; *Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets and followed Him.*‡ He in like manner called James and John, upon those two last occasions, and we read the account of their calls in the same places with those of Peter and Andrew. He also called John at the marriage-feast, as St. Jerome says; though we do not find it mentioned in the text of Scripture. He also called Philip, saying; *Follow Me;*§ and in like manner Matthew the publican.‖ As to His manner of calling the rest, it is nowhere written. Consider Him then, and regard Him on these occasions of His calling His disciples, and in His conversation with them; how affectionately He calls them, rendering Himself affable to them, and friendly, and attentive, drawing them to Him inwardly and outwardly, bringing them home with Him to His Mother's house, and going familiarly with them to theirs. He taught them, instructed them, and took as particular a care of them as a mother of an only son. It is said, as a tradition from St. Peter's account, that, whenever He slept at any place with them, He would rise at night, and if He found any of them uncovered He would wrap them up again, for most tenderly did He love them. For, though they were men of

* John, i. 40.
† Luke, v. 10.
‡ Matt. iv. 19.
§ John, i. 43.
‖ Matt. ix. 9.

rude condition and humble origin, He knew what He had designed them for, and that they should be the princes of the world, and leaders of all the faithful in the spiritual war. And here, as in God's sight, consider from what beginnings the Church took its rise. For our Lord would not choose the wise and powerful of this world, lest the wonders He was about to perform should be ascribed to their excellence; but He kept these back, and redeemed us by His own goodness, power, and wisdom.

CHAPTER XVII.

OUR LORD CHANGES WATER INTO WINE AT THE MARRIAGE-FEAST.

THOUGH it is uncertain whose marriage it was that was celebrated at Cana of Galilee, let us, for meditation's sake, suppose it to have been that of St. John the Evangelist, which St. Jerome seems to affirm in his preface to St. John. Our Lady was present at it, not as a stranger invited to it, but as the elder sister, and as the person of the highest dignity; for it was her sister's house, and she was as it were at home, as the principal lady and manager of the feast. And this we may gather from three things. First, from the sacred text, which tells us that *the Mother of Jesus was there*,* but says of Jesus and His Disciples that they were invited; which we are to understand likewise of the rest of the persons

* John, ii. 1.

present. When her sister, then, Mary Salome, the wife of Zebedee, came to her to Nazareth, which is about four leagues distant from Cana, and told her that she designed to celebrate the marriage of her son John, she went back with her to Cana, some days before the appointed time of the feast, to make preparation for it, so that, when the others were invited, she was already there. Secondly, we may gather it from her taking notice herself of the want of wine, which would seem to show that she was not there in the character of a guest, but as one who had the management of the entertainment, and observed therefore the want of wine. For, had she been sitting there as a guest, would the modest Virgin have sat, think you, by her Son, amongst the men? And, had she been sitting amongst the women, would she have discovered the want of wine, rather than any other? and, had she noticed it, would she have risen from the table to acquaint her Son? There appears an unseemliness in this; and therefore it is probable that she was not there at the time as a guest, but that she was engaged in arranging the entertainment; for we are told of her, that she was ever attentive in helping others. Thirdly, we may gather it from her giving the directions to the servants to go to her Son, and do whatever He should command them; for from this it appears that she had an authority over them, and that she had the control of the feast, and was then anxious that there should be no want of anything. According to this view of the circumstances, then, regard our Lord Jesus eating amongst the rest, like any one of the company, and sitting not amongst the chief guests, but in one of the lowest places, as we may gather from His own words. For he would not imitate the manner of the proud, who chose out the chief rooms at feasts, whom He designed afterwards to teach; *When thou art bidden of*

*any man to a wedding, go and sit down in the lowest room.** But He began first to do, and then to teach. Regard our Lady also, how considerate and cheerfully alert she is, and diligently attentive in seeing that every thing is rightly done, and how she gives the servants what they require, and shows them how, and with what things, to serve the several guests. And upon their returning to her, towards the end of the feast, and saying; "We have no more wine to set before them;" she replied; "I will procure you more; wait awhile." And going out to her Son, who was humbly sitting, as I have said, at the end of the table, near the door of the room, she said to Him; "My Son, there is no wine, and our sister is poor, and I know not how we shall get any." But He answered; *Woman, what have I to do with thee?*† This answer appears indeed severe, but it was for our instruction, according to St. Bernard, who says upon this passage, "What hast Thou to do with her, O Lord? Art not Thou her Son, and she Thy Mother? Dost Thou ask her, what have I to do with thee, Thou who art the Blessed Fruit of her pure womb? Is she not the same who conceived Thee, without injury to her modesty, and brought Thee forth, remaining still a Virgin? Is she not the same, in whose womb Thou sojournedst for nine months, at whose virgin breasts Thou wast fed, with whom when twelve years of age Thou wentest down from Jerusalem, and wast subject unto her? Why then, O Lord, is it that Thou dost now treat her thus severely, saying, *What have I to do with Thee?* Much hast Thou every way. But, ah! now I plainly see, that not as in anger, or as wishing to abash the tender modesty of Thy Virgin Mother,

* Luke, xiv. 8, 10.

† Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί;—*Gr.* Quid Mihi, et tibi est?—*Vulg.*

Thou saidst, *What have I to do with thee?* For on the servants coming to Thee, as she bade them, Thou doest without delay what she suggested. Why then, brethren, why had He thus answered her before? truly on our account, and on account of all who have been converted to the Lord, that we should no longer be disturbed by our regards for our earthly parents, or entangled by such ties in the exercises of a spiritual life. For, so long as we are of the world, we are plainly under duty to our parents; but having forsaken all things, even ourselves, much more are we free from anxiety as regards them. Thus we read of a hermit, who, upon his brother's coming to him to beg his advice, desired him to apply to another of their brothers, who had died some time before. Upon the other's replying with surprise that he was dead, 'So am I also,' answered the hermit. Admirably, therefore, has our Lord taught us not to be careful about our earthly relations farther than religion requires of us, in the answer which He made Himself to His Mother, and what a Mother! *Woman, what have I to do with thee?* Thus, too, upon another occasion, when some one told Him that His Mother and brethren stood without, desiring to speak with Him, He answered, *Who is My Mother, and who are My brethren?** Where then are those who cherish such a carnal and vain concern for their earthly relations, as if they still lived in the midst of them?"† Thus far St. Bernard. His Mother, then, in no way cast down by this reply, but relying upon His goodness, returned to the servants, and said; "Go to my Son, and whatever He shall say to you, do." They went then, and filled the water-pots with water, as the Lord commanded them. When they had done this, He said to them; "Draw now,

* Matt. xii. 48.

† Serm. 2, in Dom. 1, post Epiph.

and bear to the governor of the feast." And here observe, first, our Lord's discretion, for He sent first to the most honourable person at the feast. And, secondly, that He sat at a distance from him, for His words are; Bear it to him, as though he were some way from Him. For, as he sat in one of the chief places, we may gather that our Lord would not sit there near him, nay, that He chose for Himself the lowest place. The servants then gave the wine to him, and to the rest, speaking openly at the same time of the miracle, for they knew how it had been wrought, and His disciples believed on Him. When the feast was over, our Lord Jesus called John apart, and said to him; "Put away this your wife, and follow Me, for I will lead you to a higher marriage." Whereupon he followed Him. By His presence, then, at this marriage-feast, our Lord sanctified earthly marriage as an ordinance of God. But by His calling John from it, He gave us clearly to understand that the spiritual marriage of the soul with Him in a single life is far more perfect. Our Lord Jesus retired then from thence, intending from henceforth to apply Himself publicly and openly to the work of our salvation. But He would first conduct His Mother back to her home;* for it was meet that none but He should be the companion of our Lady on her journey. He therefore takes her, and John, and His other disciples; and they come to Capernaum, near Nazareth, and a few days after to Nazareth. Contemplate them, then, on their way, how they walk together, Mother and Son; how humbly they journey, and on foot, but most lovingly. O what a pair are they! never was such another pair seen on earth! Contemplate also His disciples reverently following, and listening to the words of our Lord. For He

* *Vid.* John, ii. 12.

was never idle, but was always either doing or saying something good. They could never, surely, be tired, travelling in such company!

CHAPTER XVIII.

OUR LORD'S SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

Our Lord Jesus, calling His disciples together apart from the crowd, went up with them into Mount Tabor, which is about two leagues from Nazareth, that He might infuse into them His heavenly doctrine. For it was meet that He should instruct them first and above others, whom He designed to set over others as masters and guides.

He taught them then many things in that place in a most beautiful and ample sermon; and no wonder it should be such, since it was delivered by the mouth of the Lord. In it, He instructed them upon the beatitudes, upon prayer, fasting, and alms-deeds, and many other truths relating to the other virtues, which you will find in the Gospel itself. Read it diligently and often, and commit its lessons to memory, for they are most heavenly. I do not, however, intend now following them out here, for that would be too long; nor do such expositions appear always to fall in with the character of meditations like these. I shall, nevertheless, here and there intersperse some of them, together with moral reflections of my own, or from the holy Fathers, as occasion and your instruction may seem to require. Let it suffice here to observe, that our Lord began this Sermon with

the subject of poverty, thereby giving us to understand, that poverty is the first foundation of the whole spiritual building. For none can follow Christ, the mirror of poverty, without encumbrance, who is burdened with the things of this world. Nor is he free, but a slave, who puts his affections under the dominion of such fleeting things. Therefore it was that He said, *Blessed are the poor in spirit.* For of my own accord I make myself the slave of whatever I affectionately love. For love, as St. Augustine* says, is as it were a weight of the soul, and bears it in whatever direction it is carried itself. And therefore we must love nothing whatever except God, or purely for the sake of God. Rightly then is the poor called Blessed, for on account of God he despises all else; and so is in a great measure united to God. But of this poverty St. Bernard thus speaks; "A powerful wing is poverty, with which we fly thus swiftly to the Kingdom of heaven. For in the case of the other virtues which follow, a promise is held out for some future period; but poverty has not so much a promise as a gift. Whence our Lord speaks in the present tense; *For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" And afterwards he adds; "For we see some poor, who, if they had but the true poverty, would not be found so faint-hearted and sad, when they might be kings, yea, kings of heaven. But there are some who are for being poor, only on the condition of wanting nothing, and who love poverty only so far as it brings with it no distress."† And elsewhere he says; "*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth,* I boldly say, *will draw all things unto Me.*‡ For, if I am clad in my Brother's likeness, I may without rashness adopt His speech. And

* Conf. xiii. 9. † Serm. iv. in Adventu.
‡ *Vid.* John, xii. 32.

if this be so, let not the rich of this world suppose that the brethren of Christ possess nothing but heavenly things, because they hear Him say; *Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* No; for they are likewise in possession of the earth; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things; not begging in misery, but possessing as lords; and so much the more truly lords of all, as they covet nothing. In a word, to a faithful lover of poverty the whole world is a fund of riches; for both its adversity and prosperity are alike subservient to him, and work together for his good. The covetous man hungers after earthly goods like a beggar; the faithful lover of poverty despises them like a prince. The one, by possessing, makes himself a beggar; the other, by despising them, becomes a lord. Ask any one of those, who with insatiable eagerness pursue worldly gain what he thinks of their conduct who sell their goods and give them to the poor, that they may purchase the Kingdom of heaven with their earthly substance, whether he considers that they act wisely or no. Wisely; he will doubtless answer. Ask him then why he neglects to do himself what he approves in others? I cannot, he will say. Why so? truly, because his mistress, covetousness, will not let him; he is not really free; he has no right to, nor possession of, what he seems to enjoy. If they are truly yours, put them out to profit, and exchange your earthly for heavenly goods. If you have not power to do it, I shall say that you are not the master, but the slave, of your money; the steward, and not the owner."* But let us return to our meditation. Contemplate then, and consider our Lord Jesus humbly sitting on the ground upon the mountain, and His dis-

* Serm. 21, in Cantic.

ciples round Him; how affably He converses with them, as if one of them; and how affectionately, benignly, and beautifully, and with what a wondrous power He speaks to them, drawing them to the practice of the several virtues. And study on every occasion, as I advised you above in my general directions, to contemplate His Divine countenance. Contemplate His disciples, how reverently, humbly, and with what fixed attention they regard Him, and listen to those wondrous words, and commit them to memory, and enjoy a sovereign delight in His words and looks. In this meditation share in their delight with them, attentive as if you beheld Him speaking, and ready to approach with them in case you should be called, and continuing to stay as long as our Lord shall permit you.

After the sermon is over, behold our Lord Jesus, together with His disciples, coming down from the Mount, and talking familiarly with them upon the road, and how that little simple company follow Him in a flock, not in formal order, but like chickens about a hen, each crowding about Him, and struggling to get near Him, the better to hear His Divine conversation. Consider also the multitude, how affectionately they run to meet Him, and bring Him their sick to be healed; for He healed all.

CHAPTER XIX.

OUR LORD HEALS THE CENTURION'S SERVANT AND THE NOBLEMAN'S SON.

Now there was at Capernaum a centurion, or captain of a hundred men, whose servant was sick. Full of faith then he sent to our Lord Jesus, and besought Him to heal him.* Our humble Lord answered; *I will come and heal him.* But when the centurion heard this, he immediately sent back to Him, saying, *Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest enter under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.* Whereupon Jesus, commending his faith, went no further, but healed his servant at a distance. In the same city was a nobleman, or petty prince, who went in person to Jesus, beseeching Him to come to his house and heal his son who was sick. Jesus refused to go; but healed his son.† Here consider the merit of faith in the centurion, and the humility of our Lord, who offered to go Himself to the servant, but refused the pomp of the nobleman. Consider, also, that we ought not to accept persons. For our Lord here honoured the soldier's servant more than the prince's son. Thus ought we also in our charitable offices to beware of eye-service, and of being influenced by outward distinction; we should rather look to the goodness, and right intention, and need of the person, and serve him, not from complaisance, but from charity.

* Matt. viii. 5. Luke, vii. 2. † John, iv. 46.

CHAPTER XX.

OUR LORD HEALS THE PARALYTIC, WHO IS LET DOWN THROUGH THE ROOF.

In the same city of Capernaum, whilst our Lord Jesus was teaching in a house, in which were many Pharisees and doctors of the law assembled out of every town of Judæa and Jerusalem; there came some persons, wishing to enter the house with a paralytic, whom they were carrying, that he might be healed by our Lord. And when they could not bring him in because of the multitude, they went up to the roof of the house, and let him down from thence into the midst, and placed him before Jesus. Our Lord Jesus then, seeing their faith, said, *Thy sins are forgiven thee.* But the Pharisees and doctors of the law, who were observing Him from malice, said within themselves that He had blasphemed God; for God alone has power to forgive sins, and this He attributed to Himself, whom they thought to be mere man. Our gracious and humble Lord then, who trieth the hearts and reins of men, answered; "Why think ye evil in your hearts?" And He added, *But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, etc.**

Here are four things worthy our meditation. First, the ineffable clearness of the understanding of Christ, who saw into the thoughts of their hearts. Secondly, that illness is often sent on account of our sins, and that

* Luke, v. 17, &c. Mark, ii. 3, &c.

absolution from the one often frees us from the other; which may also be gathered from the case mentioned below of the sick man healed at the pool of Bethesda, to whom our Lord says, *Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.** Thirdly, consider how great is the power of faith, since a person may receive benefit, even from the faith of another, as you have seen above in the case of the Centurion's servant; and will see below also in that of the woman of Canaan, through whose faith her daughter was made whole.† This is also daily verified in the baptism of children, who, if they die before years of discretion, receive, by the faith of others, the earnest by which they are saved through the merits of Christ, contrary to the accursed doctrine of some heretics. Fourthly, we may meditate upon our Lord sitting in the midst of them, and graciously answering the malignant Pharisees, and working the miracle; and for this recur to the general rules for meditation which I have given you.

CHAPTER XXI.

OUR LORD HEALS SIMON'S MOTHER-IN-LAW.

It happened, that our Lord Jesus in the same city went into Simon Peter's house, in which his mother-in-law lay sick of a violent fever.‡ Our humble Lord then with familiar kindness touched her hand, and healed her, so that she immediately arose, and ministered to Him

* John, v. 14.
† Matt. xv. 22, &c.
‡ Matt. viii. 14. Mark, i. 29.

and His disciples. But what was it that she ministered? This we do not find recorded. We may piously imagine then, that in the house of such poor persons nothing but the most coarse viands, and such as could quickly be got ready, were set by them before the great Lover of poverty. You may devoutly regard, also, our Lord Jesus humbly helping to set things in order, particularly as it was in His disciple's house. And here think of any humble offices; such as arranging the table, or washing the couches and the like; for all such things we may reasonably believe the Master of Humility to have done, who *came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.** Consider Him then familiarly seated at table in the midst of this little company, and cheerfully eating with them, and with so much the more pleasure as poverty, which He so loved, shone conspicuously at their simple board.

CHAPTER XXII.

OUR LORD ASLEEP IN THE SHIP.

Our Lord Jesus entering into a ship with His disciples, laid Himself down to sleep, placing His head upon a pillow.† For, indeed, He commonly passed the greater part of His nights in watching and prayer, and of His days in the toil of preaching. And whilst He was asleep, a sudden storm arising, His disciples were afraid that they were in danger of perishing, but they did not dare awake Him. At length, overcome with fear, they did

* Matt. xx. 28. † Matt. viii. 23. Mark, iv. 38. Luke, viii. 22.

so, saying; *Lord, save us; we perish.* Our Lord arose, and, chiding them for their want of faith, rebuked the winds and the sea; and the storm ceased.

In these circumstances, contemplate and regard our Lord according to the general instructions which I gave you above. You may also add this consideration, that though our Lord seem to us at times to sleep, as regards us and our concerns, especially when we are in tribulation, yet He is really most diligently watchful in the guard which He keeps over us. And therefore we ought to be firm in faith, doubting nothing.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OUR LORD RAISES THE WIDOW'S SON.

As our Lord Jesus was going once towards the city of Nain,* He met a multitude of people carrying to the grave the dead body of a young man, the son of a widow. Our compassionate Lord Jesus, then, moved with pity, touched the bier, and those who were bearing it stood still. And He said; *Young man, I say unto thee, arise.* And he that was dead immediately arose, and He delivered him to his mother. *And there came a fear on all; and they glorified God.* Here recur to the general heads of meditation.

* Luke, vii. 11.

CHAPTER XXIV.

OUR LORD RAISES THE RULER'S DAUGHTER; AND HEALS ST. MARTHA.

At the request of a certain ruler, our Lord Jesus was going with him to heal his daughter. A great multitude accompanied Him, among whom was a woman afflicted with a grievous infirmity, who is said to have been Martha, the sister of Mary Magdalene. *She said within herself; If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole.** And, approaching with fear, she touched Him, and was made whole. But our Lord Jesus said; *Who touched Me?* And Peter answered; *Master, the multitude throng Thee and press Thee, and sayest Thou; Who touched Me?* See here the patience of our Lord, who suffered Himself often to be pressed by the rude populace; for they were eager to be near Him. But Jesus knew what He said, and said again; *I perceive that virtue is gone out of Me.* Martha then declared what had taken place. Our Lord gladly healed her; and afterwards admitted her to very close familiarity with Him. He then said to her; *Thy faith hath made thee whole.* In this miracle, then, you have our Lord's commendation of faith; you see also that our Lord would have His miracles made known, for the good of others, but yet is so humble as to conceal the part He has in them, as in this instance; for what He wrought by His own Divine power He attributed to her faith. This passage is very important

* Matt. ix. 20. Luke, viii. 43.

towards the cultivation of humility, as St. Bernard notices. "Every perfect servant of our Lord," he says, "may be called the hem or lowest part of our Lord's garment, on account of the humble opinion which he entertains of himself." Whoever, then, has attained to the privilege of knowing that he is heard by our Lord in healing the sick, or in working other miracles, let him not be elated on that account, or attribute it to himself; for the work is not his, but the Lord's. For though Martha, on this occasion, touched the hem, by touching which she trusted to be healed, as she really was; yet it was not from the hem, but from our Lord, that the virtue of healing went forth. And therefore He said; *I perceive that virtue is gone out of Me.* Mark this well, then, and never again attribute any good to yourself, for it is wholly from our Lord Jesus. At length our Lord Jesus went to the ruler's house, and raised to life his daughter, whom He found dead.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CONVERSION OF ST. MARY MAGDALENE.

Our most gracious Lord,* one day, at the invitation of Simon the leper, went to dine with him, as He was in the habit of doing, out of His natural courtesy and kindness, and the zeal which He had for the salvation of souls, for whom He had come down from heaven. Thus by eating with men, and familiarly conversing with them, He drew them to the love of Himself. He was also led to do so by His love of poverty. For He was Himself

* Luke, vii. 36, &c.

extremely poor, and had taken nothing of this world's substance for Himself or those who belonged to Him. Humbly, therefore, and thankfully, did Jesus, the Mirror of Humility, receive their invitation, as occasion offered. But Magdalene, hearing that He was dining in the house of Simon, having perhaps often heard Him preach, and loving Him ardently, though she had not as yet given any outward proofs of it, touched inwardly with sorrow at her heart for her sins, and inflamed with the fire of His love, convinced that without Him she could not hope to obtain salvation, and resolving to delay no longer, went straight to the place where our Lord was, and with her face bent to the ground, and her eyes cast down, passing before all the guests, she did not stop till she reached her beloved Lord. Then throwing herself on the spot at His feet, and filled with the deepest grief and shame at her sins, bending down and leaning her face over His feet, with a secret confidence which she felt from knowing that she loved Him above all things, she began, with strong sobbing and streams of tears, to say silently within herself; "Lord, I firmly believe, know, and confess that Thou art my God and my Lord; much and greatly have I offended Thy Majesty, and multiplied my sins above the number of the sand of the sea; but I flee for refuge to Thy mercy, wicked and sinner as I am. I am sorry and am grieved from my soul; I beg for pardon; I am ready to amend; and I am resolved never again to leave Thy service. Oh! reject me not, for I know that I can have no other refuge but Thee; nor do I wish for any, for I love Thee above all things. Cast me not away then from Thee, but punish me, as Thou mayest think fit; but yet grant me the mercy for which I sue." Her tears meanwhile flowed down in streams, and bathed and washed the feet of our Lord. Hence you may plainly see that our Lord

Jesus went barefooted. At length checking her tears, and judging them unworthy to fall on our Lord's sacred feet, she wiped them off with her hair. Her hair she used, for she had nothing more precious to employ; and what had ministered to her former vanity, she would fain apply to her present work of devotion. And, that she might still keep her face close to the feet of our Lord, she kissed them with growing love, and devout eagerness. And, because they were soiled with His frequent journeys, she anointed them with precious ointment. Regard her well, then, and meditate at leisure on all that here took place, on account of her devotion, who was so singularly beloved by our Lord, and also because this was a most high and solemn feast. Regard, also, our Lord Jesus, how graciously He receives her, and how patiently He bears with all she does. He pauses from eating until she has done. The guests also pause; and all are astonished at the novelty. But Simon judged Him severely in his heart, thinking He would not have allowed Himself to be touched by such a woman, had He been a prophet, and known who she was. But our Lord, replying to the thoughts of his heart, showed Himself to be a true prophet, and convicted him by the parable of the debtors. And, wishing to show openly that all things are perfected in love, He said; *Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much.* And He said to her; *Go in peace.* O sweet and delightful words! How gladly did Magdalene hear them, how joyfully did she retire! And now, truly converted, she led ever after an innocent and holy life, and adhered with constancy to our Lord.

Meditate, then, on these circumstances with all the devotion you can, and strive to imitate this wondrous charity, which is so highly commended by our Lord on this occasion, both in word and deed. For here you have an

express proof that charity works reconciliation between God and a sinner. Whence, also, blessed Peter says that *charity covereth a multitude of sins.** Since, then, charity is the soul of all virtues, and none is pleasing to God without it, I will quote you some authorities in praise of it, in order that you may strive with all your power to acquire it, and thereby render yourself acceptable to your Spouse, Christ Jesus. St. Bernard says of it, "A sovereign and incomparable grace must be charity, since the heavenly Bridegroom is so earnest in enforcing it to His new Spouse. At one time saying; *By this, shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.*† At another; *A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another.*‡ And; *This is My commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you;*§ praying, also, that they might be one, even as He and the Father are One."‖ And a little after; "In a word, what can we place in comparison with this, which is preferred to martyrdom itself, and to faith which can remove mountains? This then is what I say, Let your peace be within you, and nothing that may seem to threaten you from without shall have any terrors for you, for it cannot hurt you."¶ Again; "Let the value of every soul be rated by its measure of charity; for example, the soul which has much charity is great; that which has little is small; that which has none is nothing, as the Apostle says; *If I have not charity, I am nothing.*** However, if it begin to possess ever so slender a portion, or to love those who love it, and to salute its brethren and those who salute it,†† I would not say that such a soul is absolutely nothing,

* *Vid.* 1 Pet. iv. 8. † John, xiii. 35. ‡ Ibid. 34.
§ John, xv. 12. ‖ John, xvii. 22. ¶ Serm. 29, in Cant.
** *Vid.* 1 Cor. xiii. 2. †† Matt. v. 46.

since, in the way of giving and receiving, it retains at least social charity. And yet, according to our Lord's words, *What does it more than others?** I cannot, then, by any means, think a soul great, but rather very little and very contracted, when I discover so slender a share of charity in it. But if it grow up and advance so as to pass the limits of this narrow and constrained love, and to embrace with entire liberty of spirit the widest range of gratuitous bounty, by extending itself with profuseness of good-will to every neighbour, and loving every one as itself, can we any longer say to it; *What dost thou more than others?* Such an one truly enlarges itself, yea, spreads abroad the bosom of its charity, and embraces all, even those to whom it is in no way joined by ties of blood, nor drawn by hope of interest, nor bound by claims for the past, nor by any other obligation, save that of which the Apostle speaks; *Owe no man anything, but to love one another.*† However, if you will advance still further, and invade the kingdom of charity at every point, and by devout assault take possession of it to its utmost bounds, open, then, the bowels of your compassion to your very enemies, *do good to them that hate you, pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you;*‡ nay, moreover, strive to be peaceable even with them that hate peace;§ then truly the breadth and height of heaven and of your soul are alike, and their beauty the same. And then shall be fulfilled in it the words of the Psalmist; *He spreadeth out the heavens like a curtain.*‖ And in this heaven of your soul, grown to such wondrous height, and breadth, and beauty, the Most High shall deign not only to dwell, but to walk abroad at large in all

* *Vid.* Matt. v. 47. † Rom. xiii. 8. ‡ Matt. v. 44.
§ *Vid.* Ps. cxx. 6. ‖ *Vid.* Ps. civ. 2.

His immensity and glory."* You have seen, then, how useful and necessary a virtue is charity; without which it is impossible to please God, and with which no one can fail to be pleasing in His sight. Study then, with all your heart, and all your mind, and all your strength, to acquire it; for it will enable you to bear with cheerfulness every hardship and severity for the sake of God and your neighbour.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST SENDS HIS DISCIPLES TO JESUS.

THAT glorious soldier and forerunner of our Lord Jesus, John Baptist, had been bound and put in prison by Herod for his defence of the truth, in reproving him for taking the wife of his brother who was still alive. Wishing then to lead his disciples to follow our Lord Jesus, he thought of sending them to Him, that hearing His divine words, and seeing the works which He wrought, they might be enkindled with the love of Him, and be drawn to follow Him. Accordingly they came to Jesus, and said to Him as from John; *Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?* † Now our Lord Jesus was at the time surrounded by a great multitude. Behold Him then attentively, with what a pleasing aspect He receives the messengers of John, and how wisely He answers them, first in deeds, and then in words. In their presence then He healed the deaf and dumb and blind, and wrought many other miracles, and

* Serm. 27, in Cant. † Matt. xi. 3, &c.

preached to the people, and then amongst other things said to the disciples of John; *Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see.* They went then and related these things to John, who gladly heard the joyful tidings. And after the death of John these disciples firmly adhered to Christ. After they had gone away, our Lord Jesus praised John very highly before the people, saying that he was more than a prophet; and that among those born of women there had not risen a greater than he, and other things, as you may find in the Gospel. Do you then contemplate our Lord Jesus, in every situation, whether preaching or working the miracles I have mentioned, or doing aught else, according to the directions I have already given you.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BEHEADING OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST.

Here occurs a fit place, perhaps, for meditating on the death of blessed John Baptist. When then the wicked Herod, and his infamous adulteress, had perhaps already plotted together to put him to death, that they might escape his reproaches for their sin; it happened that at a public feast made by Herod, Herodias, their wretched daughter, pleased him so well by her dancing that he gave her at her request the head of John. And thus was he beheaded in prison. Behold here how great a man is put to death, and how shamefully and barbarously he is murdered by the wickedness of a reigning tyrant. O, great God! how didst Thou suffer this? What shall

we think of John dying thus, one whose perfection and sanctity were such that he was supposed to be the Christ? If then you would digest this well, consider first the wickedness of his murderers, and then the singular greatness and eminence of John, and you will find fresh subject of amazement.

You have already heard, in a former chapter, the many praises bestowed upon him by our Lord. Hear now what St. Bernard says of him. "In all things he is singularly eminent, wonderful above all. Who was so gloriously announced? Who so specially filled with the Holy Spirit in his mother's womb? Who like him ever leapt for joy before his birth? Whose nativity except his does the Church celebrate?* Who was ever such a lover of the desert? Whose conversation so heavenly? Who first preached repentance and the Kingdom of heaven? Who baptized the King of Glory? To whom first did the Holy Trinity thus plainly reveal Itself? To whom did our Lord Jesus Christ ever give such testimony? Whom has the Church so highly honoured as John? John is a Patriarch; yea, the last and head of the patriarchs. John is a Prophet, yea, more than a prophet; for Him, whose Coming he foretells, he points out with his finger. John is an Angel, yea, elect among angels, our Saviour testifying it, who says; *Behold, I send My angel, etc.*† John was an Apostle; yea, first of apostles and their chief, the first

* *i. e.* of Saints; as distinguished on the one hand from our Lord Himself, and, on the other, from the Blessed Virgin, whose Nativity is commemorated in the Church, not as she was a Saint, but as she was Mother of God. Or it may have been, that the Feast of the Nativity of the B. Virgin Mary was not of universal obligation in St. Bernard's time, and that he refers to such only as were. That it *existed* in his time appears from his Letters, 86 and 174.

† *Vid.* Matt. xi. 10. Angelum, *Vulg.*

of those who were sent from God.* John was an Evangelist, yea, the first herald of the Gospel, a preacher preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God. John was a Virgin, yea, a peerless mirror of virginity, a very symbol of modesty, a model of chastity. John was a Martyr, yea, and the light of martyrs. Between the Birth and Death of Christ, a most constant figure of martyrdom. He was *the voice of one crying in the wilderness*,† the Forerunner of the Judge, the Herald of the WORD. He is Elias ;‡ until his time prophesied the Law and the Prophets;§ he *was a burning and a shining light*.‖ I pass over in silence his attaining such a rank amongst the choir of Angels, as even to be chief of all the Seraphim."¶ Thus far St. Bernard. Hear now his praises by Peter Chrysogonus, Archbishop of Ravenna, in a sermon, in which he says; "John is the school of virtues, the discipline of life, a model of sanctity, the rule of justice," &c. If then you contrast together the pre-eminent dignity of John, and the depth of their wickedness who murdered him, you will have just subject of astonishment, and of devout complaint, if I may say so, even before God. What! shall a common headsman be sent to take away the life of such and so great a Saint, as if he were the most vile and wicked robber or murderer? Contemplate him then with reverence and sorrow, how he stoops his neck at the command of this worthless and wicked executioner, how humbly he bends his knees, and giving thanks to God places his sacred head upon some block or stone, and patiently receives the repeated strokes which sever it from his body. Be-

* John, i. 6. † John, i. 23. ‡ Matt. xi. 14.
§ Matt. xi. 13. ‖ John, v. 35.
¶ This Sermon is generally attributed, not to St. Bernard, but to Nicholas, one of the brethren of Clairvaux.

hold, such is the departure of John, the intimate friend, and near relation, and familiar of our Lord Jesus. Oh! what a confusion is this for us, who lose all patience under the least adversity! The innocent John meets death, and such a death, with patience; and we, for the most part, deeply stained with repeated sins, and deserving the anger of God, cannot bear even the slightest injuries and grievances; nay, often not the least word. Our Lord Jesus was in Judæa at this time; though not upon the spot. But when He was informed of John's death, our tender Lord bewailed His faithful servant and kinsman; His disciples also mourned with Him, and so did the Blessed Virgin, who had nursed him at his birth, and always loved him most tenderly. Our Lord, however, consoled His blessed Mother, but she said; "My Son, why didst not Thou defend him, and save him from so cruel a death?" To whom her Divine Son replied; "Revered Mother, it was not expedient that I should thus protect him. For he has died for the sake of My Father, and in defence of His righteousness; but he will quickly be in his glory. It is not My heavenly Father's will thus to defend His own in this world; for He designs not that they should continue here; for their country is not here, but in heaven. John is now free from the prison of the body, nor can the world any longer keep him, nor has death any more power over him. The Enemy has spent all the fury of his rage upon him, but he shall reign with My Father for ever. Be comforted then, dearest Mother, for from henceforth all will be well with John." A few days afterwards our Lord Jesus left those parts and returned to Galilee. Do you dwell, gentle reader, upon all the circumstances I have mentioned, and render yourself present at them, and devoutly meditate upon them, and follow our Lord whithersoever He goes.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

OUR LORD TALKS WITH THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.

As our Lord Jesus was on His way back from Judæa to Galilee, which is a distance of seventy miles and more, as I have had occasion to mention several times, and was passing through Samaria, He was wearied with His journey. Behold in Him your God, and see how He is wearied. Here you see Him walking; and often was He wearied; for His whole life was full of toil. He sat down then, and rested Himself upon a well;* and His disciples went into the town to buy food. There came a woman then, whose name (according to tradition) was Lucia, to the well to draw water. Our Lord began to talk with her, and to speak of great mysteries, and to manifest Himself to her. What the particulars of His conversation were, and how His disciples returned, and how upon the account of the woman the city came out to meet Him, and how He went with them, and, after staying for a time with them, at length left them, I do not purpose relating; for this is all clearly set forth in the Gospel history. Read it then, and contemplate our Lord Jesus in all His actions. But you may gather from the account of what took place some beautiful and profitable things to notice. And, first, consider the humility of our Lord Jesus; for our humble Lord remained behind alone whilst His disciples went into the town; with such confidence and familiarity would He be treated by them; then, how humbly did He talk to that poor woman by herself, of such great mysteries, and converse with her, as if an equal. For He did not

* John, iv. 5, &c.

disdain to treat with her, simple as she was, upon subjects which it would have been a great condescension in Him to have spoken of even before crowds of the wisest men. Far different is the conduct of the proud. For if they bestow their words swollen with vanity upon but a few, much more if upon one, they count them as wasted, and their hearers as unworthy of them. Secondly, consider His poverty, and affliction of the body, and His humility in union with them. For here you see how His disciples went into the town to buy food, which they brought to Him, and pressed Him to eat. But where, think you, did He eat? doubtless at the well, or by some stream or fountain. See, then, in what manner He refreshed Himself, wearied and hungry as He was. And you are not to imagine that this so happened once only by accident, for such was His usual custom. Whence you may plainly gather that our humble Lord, the lover of poverty, as He journeyed through the country, would often take His repast outside the towns and dwellings of men, near some stream or fountain, however wearied or faint He might be. Neither did He use exquisite meats, curious plate, nor delicate wines, but pure water from the fountain or stream. He who makes the vineyards abundantly fruitful, who created the fountains, and all that move in the waters, who gives food to all, sat humbly and took His repast, like any poor man, upon the ground. Thirdly, consider, how intent He was upon the thought of heavenly things. For when His disciples invited Him to eat, He said, *I have meat to eat that ye know not of. My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work;* wherefore, before He would eat anything, He waited till the people of the city came, that He might first preach to them, wishing to attend to what concerned the good of their souls, before the refresh-

ment of His own body, notwithstanding His great need of it. Contemplate Him, then, in all the circumstances as I have mentioned them, and study to imitate His virtues.

CHAPTER XXIX.

OUR LORD'S LIFE ATTEMPTED AT NAZARETH.

When our Lord Jesus had returned to Nazareth, the Jews desired to see some miracles wrought by Him; but He showed them that they were unworthy of such sights; whereupon, incensed with rage, they thrust Him out of their city.* The meek Lord then fled before them, and they pursued Him. What think you? To such a pitch was their fury kindled and increased, that they led Him to the brow of the hill, in order to cast Him down headlong. But our Lord, by His Divine power passing through the midst of them, went His way, for the time was not yet come at which He had chosen to die. Contemplate Him, then, flying before them, and concealing Himself under a rock, and compassionate His afflictions, and endeavour to imitate Him in His humility and patience.

* Luke, iv. 29.

CHAPTER XXX.

OUR LORD HEALS THE MAN WITH THE WITHERED HAND.

One Sabbath day our Lord Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, and there was there a man with a withered hand, whom our Lord made to stand forth in the midst, and asked of the doctors whether it were lawful to do good on the Sabbath day. But they held their peace. Our Lord Jesus then said to the man who had the withered hand, *Stretch forth thy hand;* and he was healed.* On several occasions our Lord wrought miracles on the Sabbath days to confound the Jews, who gave a carnal interpretation to the Law, which God would have observed according to the spirit. For the Law did not enjoin abstinence from good and from works of charity on the Sabbath, but from sins and servile works. But they were greatly offended at Him in consequence, and conspired against Him, and said, "This man is not from God, for he keeps not the Sabbath." But our Lord did not on this account desist from working miracles on the Sabbath; nay, He was all the more at pains to do so that He might rid them of their mistake. Consider Him then in the exercise of these charitable actions, and after His example cease not from good works, even though others should unjustly take offence at them; for the fear of such scandal ought never to make us desist from any good work which is necessary to the salvation of a soul, or even to the advancement of its spiritual welfare. But

* Luke, vi. 6.

from any bodily satisfaction we ought to abstain, according to the law of perfect charity, if it give scandal to a brother. Wherefore the Apostle to the Romans says, *It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.**

CHAPTER XXXI.

OUR LORD MULTIPLIES THE LOAVES.

We read that on two occasions our loving Lord multiplied a few loaves, with which He fully satisfied many thousands of people.† But do you reduce them both into one meditation, and in it attentively consider the words and actions of our Lord. *I have compassion*, He said, *on the multitude, because they have now been with Me three days, and have nothing to eat; and if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way, for divers of them came from far.* He afterwards multiplied the loaves, and so they all eat, and were satisfied. Here are many good things to consider, and particularly how merciful our Lord Jesus showed Himself, and kind and courteous, and discreet and circumspect. First, then, consider His mercy; for that it was which drew Him to relieve their necessity; and therefore He says, *I have compassion on the multitude.* For, *The earth is full of His mercy.*‡ Secondly, He shows His

* Rom. xiv. 21. † Matt. xv. 32. Mark, viii. 1.
‡ *Vid.* Ps. xxxiii. 5.

marvellous kindness and courtesy in the reason which He gives; *Because*, says He, *they have now been with Me three days*. For He speaks as if they conferred a favour upon Him by staying with Him, whereas, in truth, it was for their own good, not His. But, indeed, so it is, as He Himself elsewhere says; *My delights are with the sons of men*,* though it be no benefit to Him, but the source of salvation to ourselves. But the Lord loves those who follow Him, and keep His precepts and counsels; nor does He close His hand in their necessities, but succours and relieves them as they require it. Thirdly, He shows His discretion and circumspection in His consideration for their wants and weakness; *If I send them away fasting*, He said, *they will faint by the way, for divers of them come from far*. You see, then, how full of sweetness and heavenly comfort were these words. The same happens daily to us in our spiritual life: for we have nothing to eat, unless He gives it to us; and we faint on the way, if He sends us away fasting; and without Him we cannot provide for ourselves in any of our spiritual affairs. We have no reason, then, for being elated when we receive any consolation at the hand of the Lord, or are sensible of any advance in our spiritual course; for it is not from ourselves, but from Him. And therefore, if you regard attentively the servants of God, you will see that the more perfect they are, and the nearer to God, and the more eminent in His gifts, the more deeply are they grounded in humility; for they attribute nothing to themselves but sins and defects. For the nearer any approaches to Him, the more fully is he enlightened; and therefore the more clearly does he see the greatness and the mercy of God; and so

* *Vid.* Prov. viii. 31. Deliciæ Meæ, esse cum filiis hominum. Vulg.

pride and vain-glory, which have their origin in the blindness of ignorance, can find no place in him. For no one can be proud who has a true knowledge of God or of himself. We have also *come from far* to God; and this I say specially of myself, and of those who, like me, have departed from Him into so distant a country by our sins. Any one, then, returning to Him may be said truly to come from far. Now, after Christ had spoken the above-mentioned words, He proceeded to deeds. Behold Him, then, how He took the loaves, and, giving thanks to God, gave them to His disciples to set before the multitude; and how He multiplied them in their hands, so that they all eat as much as they would, and many fragments remained over. Consider, also, how He looks on them while they eat, and is pleased at beholding the pleasure with which they take their repast. Consider the people, also, how they wonder at the miracle, and with what joy they talk together of it, and render thanks to Him, whilst refreshing their bodies, and some, perhaps, rejoicing their souls as well, with heavenly food.

CHAPTER XXXII.

OUR LORD FLIES WHEN THE PEOPLE WOULD MAKE HIM KING.

Upon our Lord's feeding the multitude, as is contained in the preceding chapter, they were desirous to make Him king. For they considered that He was well able to relieve their necessities, and it seemed that under such a king they could never want. But our Lord Jesus, knowing their wish, fled from them into a mountain, un-

perceived by them, so that they could not find Him. Thus, you see, our Lord refused the honours of this world. And observe how truly and unfeignedly He shuns them; for He sent away His disciples by sea, and went up Himself into the mountain, that if they continued to search for Him amongst His disciples they might not find Him. His disciples, however, were unwilling to be parted from Him, but He forced them to get into the ship, and to cross over to the other side. Their wish was, indeed, a good one, to remain always with their Lord; but He wished it otherwise. Consider them then, how unwillingly they leave Him, and how our Lord Jesus compelled them, showing them that it was His wish they should go into the ship without Him; upon which they humbly obey Him, however grievous and hard it may seem to them. Thus does our Lord act daily with us in our spiritual life. For we would fain have Him never leave us at any time, but His pleasure is different; He visits the soul and again leaves it, as He pleases, but ever for our good. I should wish you, then, to hear what St. Bernard says on this subject: "After the heavenly Spouse," says he, "has been sought for with continued vigils and prayers, and copious floods of tears, on a sudden, whilst we think that He is ours, He escapes, and again, as we are pursuing Him and weeping, does He meet us, and suffer Himself to be taken; but not to be detained, for suddenly again, even while we think we hold Him, He escapes from us; and, if the devout soul persevere in her prayers and tears, He will return anew, and will not deny her the request of her lips.* But soon again will He disappear, and be no longer seen, unless He be sought again with the whole affection.

* Ps. xxi. 2.

Thus, then, even whilst we are in this body, there may be frequent joy at the presence of the Spouse, but never fulness of satisfaction; for though His visits impart joy, yet the frequent vicissitudes of absence bring equal pain. And such sufferings must the beloved continue to endure, until, once for all, laying aside the heavy burden of the body, she flee away, and borne aloft on the wings of her desires, and freely soaring through the fields of contemplation, she follow her Beloved whithersoever He goes. Nor yet even upon her passage from the body shall every soul at once attain to this blessedness, but only that one which approves herself as a loving spouse by intense devotion, and vehement desire, and sweet affection, and shows herself worthy of receiving the approach and visit of the Divine Word, when He has put on His glorious apparel, and presents Himself as her Spouse."* Elsewhere he says, "Perchance He withdrew Himself, that He might be the more eagerly recalled, and held the more strongly. For at another time, too, *He made as though He would have gone further*,—not that He wished to do so, but because He wished to hear those words, which followed thereupon, *Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent*."† And shortly afterwards he adds, "This same pious feint, yea rather, wholesome œconomy, which at that time the Word in bodily form often practised towards the body, He ceases not now in Spirit to repeat from time to time, in a special and peculiar manner, to exercise the devout soul. Passing by, He wishes to be detained; going away, He wishes to be recalled; His departure is ever a dispensation of His Providence, and His return ever the purpose of His will; but in both is the fulness of infinite wis-

* Serm. 32, in Cantic. † Luke, xxiv. 28.

dom, the great ends of which are known only to Himself. Experience shows that the soul is frequently exercised with these vicissitudes of the absence and return of the Divine Word, even as He Himself has said; *I go away, and come again unto you;** and again; *A little while and ye shall not see Me, and again a little while and ye shall see Me.*† O, a little while, and not a little while! O, a little while, and yet a long while, dear Lord! A little while, Thou sayest, and we shall not see Thee! With humblest reverence to Thy sacred word, O Lord, it is a long while, and much, very much too long a while; and yet both are true; it is a little while in comparison with our deserts; but a long while, if measured by our wishes. Both are spoken of by the Prophet; *Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.*‡ How is it, that it shall not tarry, and yet that it shall tarry; unless it be that what is abundant for our deserts, is yet too little for our wishes. The loving soul, borne onward by her desires, and drawn by her affection, overlooks her merits, shuts her eyes to the dazzling majesty of her Spouse, opens them to the joy of His presence, placing her hope in His salvation, and dealing confidently with Him.§ Fearless at length, and laying aside her bashfulness, she boldly recals the Divine Word, and with confidence invites the object of her delight, calling Him with wonted freedom, not her Lord, but her Beloved, and saying, *Return, my Beloved.*"‖ Again; "He ceases not to exercise with these vicissitudes those who lead the spiritual life, or rather those in whom He designs Himself to form it, *visiting them every morning, and trying*

* John, xiv. 28. † John, xvi. 16. ‡ Habakkuk, ii. 3.
§ *Vid.* Ps. xii. 6. Ponam in salutari; fiducialiter agam in eo. Vulg.
‖ *Vid.* Cant. ii. 17. Serm. 74, in Cantic.

*them every moment."** You see, then, how our Lord Jesus spiritually visits and leaves the soul, and how the soul ought to behave upon such occasions. For she ought to recal Him earnestly and instantly, yet in the meanwhile to support with patience the absence of her Spouse, and, after the example of the disciples who here in obedience to Him went into the ship without Him, to bear up against the storms which threaten her, and to hope for succour and deliverance at His hands. But let us now return to our Lord Jesus. For when the disciples had entered the ship, and were embarked upon the sea, He went up into the mountain alone, and so escaped the hands of those who were seeking Him. You see with what pains and caution He fled, and declined the honour of a kingdom. And herein He left us an example, that we should do the same. It was not for His own sake, but for ours, that He fled. For He knew what rashness we are apt to be hurried into, if we aspire after worldly honours. Such honours are among the greatest snares which, as far as I know, can be laid to take us. They are among the most powerful means of assault for the subversion of our souls, whether they consist in the distinctions of ecclesiastical or of secular preferment, of authority or of learning. For it can scarcely be but that those who take delight in such honours should stand upon the brink of a most dangerous precipice, or rather, what is worse, be already dashed down the precipice; and this for many reasons. First, because the mind becomes wholly engrossed by them, and is only careful how it may preserve and increase them. And according to St. Gregory; "In proportion as any one takes pleasure in lower objects, is he alienated from the love of the Sovereign

* *Vid.* Job, vii. 18.

Good."* Secondly, because such an one is taken up with procuring friends, and followers, and supporters, by whose means and assistance he may maintain and increase his honours; in consequence of which many circumstances occur in which he is led to act against God and his own conscience with a view to gratify these friends, and induce them to work for him. Thirdly, because he is jealous of those who are possessed of these honours, and detracts from their merit, that so he may remain more distinguished; and thus he falls into the sins of hatred and envy. Fourthly, because he esteems himself, and would be esteemed by others, worthy of honour, and so becomes elated and proud. But, according to the Apostle; *If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.*† And, therefore, our Lord says in the Gospel; *When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants.*‡ Fifthly, because he walks not according to the spirit, but according to the flesh, for he keeps not his heart raised and united to heavenly things, but unsettled and dissipated upon a variety of objects. Sixthly and lastly, because, as soon as he begins to take delight in honours, he is so allured by them, that he can never be satisfied, and daily procures new and greater ones, and the more he receives the more he pants after; for he ever believes himself to be more than ordinarily honourable and worthy, both in his own eyes and in those of others; and thus he falls into ambition, that most hateful vice, and the root and cause of many others. Of its extreme malignity, hear what St. Bernard says; "Ambition is a subtle evil, and secret poison, a hidden plague, a contriver of guile, the mother of hypo-

* Lib. ii. Hom. xxx. in Evang. † Galat. vi. 3. ‡ Luke, xvii. 10.

crisy, the parent of envy; the source of vices, the fuel of sins, the rust of virtues, the cankerworm of holiness, the hardener of hearts, out of remedies creating disease, out of medicine engendering sickness. How many has this pernicious evil undermined, and at last shamefully overthrown: so that others, who had been long blind to the secret working of the Enemy, have been at length struck with sudden terror at the ruin which he has achieved. And what is it that nourishes this destructive worm, but dissipation of mind, and forgetfulness of the truth? Or what but the Truth can track and bring to light this traitor, and lay open this work of darkness? It is the Truth, who says: *What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?** And again: *A sharp judgment shall be to them that be in high places.*† It is the Truth, Who constantly suggests to the mind the reflection, how frivolous is the consolation which ambition can supply, how heavy its judgment, how short its enjoyment, how uncertain its end. And therefore, the third temptation of our Lord was to ambition, when the tempter promised Him all the kingdoms of the world, if He would fall down and worship him. For you see that the way of ambition is a worshipping of the devil, by which he promises his worshippers that they shall obtain glory and the honours of this world."‡ Elsewhere he says: "We are fond of rising, and all desire to be exalted: for we are by nature noble creatures, and of a certain greatness of soul, and therefore naturally aspire to be elevated. But woe be to us, if we would follow him, who says: *I will sit upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the North.*§ O wretch, in the sides of the

* Matt. xvi. 26.
† Wisd. vi. 5.
‡ Serm. 6. in Ps. Qui habitat.
§ Is. xiv. 13.

North! That is withal too cold a mountain; we will not follow thee; though thou covet eminence and grasp at the height of power. Yet how many are there to this day, who follow thy foul and fatal steps, nay, how few who escape being enslaved by the lust of power. Whom are you thus following, wretched men? whom are you following? Is not this the mount which the Angel ascended, and came down a Devil? Know you not, that after his fall, tortured with envy, and anxious in his malice to ruin man, he pointed out to him such another mountain, and said, *Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil?*" * Shortly afterwards he adds; "This love of power deprived the Angel of angelic happiness. So, too, the desire of knowledge stripped man of the glory of immortality. Let a man try to scale the steep of power, how many opponents will he meet, how many foes to drive him back, how many obstacles, how difficult a road. What if he reach at length the object of his desires? *Mighty men,* says Scripture, *shall be mightily tormented;*† so that it is needless to speak of the present disquietudes and anxieties which the very possession of power brings with it. Another is desirous of *knowledge* which *puffeth up;*‡ what labour shall he have! how shall his soul be tortured! and after all he will be told, 'Though you burst yourself, you cannot reach it.' His eye shall pine in bitterness, as often as he sees one to whom he thinks himself inferior, or imagines that others so think. What if he mightily swell himself? *I will destroy,* says the Lord, *the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.*§ Not to say more, you have seen, I think, how carefully

* Gen. iii. 5. † Wisd. vi. 6. ‡ 1 Cor. viii. 1.
§ 1 Cor. i. 19. *Vid.* Is. xxix. 14. Obad. 8.

we must shun either mount, if we are smitten with any dread at the ruin of the angel, or the fall of man. *Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain upon you.** Yet what shall we do? We must not ascend by this way; yet by nature we aspire to rise; who then shall teach us a salutary ascent? Who but He of whom we read, *He that descended, is the same also that ascended.*† He it is, from whom we must learn the way of ascent, lest we follow the steps or counsel of that wicked guide or rather seducer. Seeing, then, that none could ascend, He, the Most High, descended, and by His Descent hallowed for us a sweet and saving ascent. He descended from the mount of power, when He clothed Himself in the weakness of flesh; He descended from the mount of knowledge, when *it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*‡ For what can seem more weak than the tender body and little limbs of an infant? What more unlearned, than a babe that knows only its mother's breast? Who more powerless than He, all whose limbs are nailed to a cross, and all whose bones may be told? Who more foolish than He, *who poured out His soul unto death,*§ *and paid the things that He never took.*‖ Do you see, then, how He who descended, emptied Himself of power and wisdom? Nor could He ascend higher than He did into the mount of goodness, nor commend His love by more evident signs. And no wonder that Christ by descending arose, when it was by ascending that both the others fell."¶ Again, "Therefore, dearly beloved, persevere in the discipline which you have entered upon, that by humility you may ascend

* 2 Sam. i. 21. † Eph. iv. 10. ‡ 1 Cor. i. 21.
§ Is. liii. 12. ‖ Ps. lxix. 5. ¶ Serm. 4. in Asc. Dom.

on high; for this is the way, and beside it there is no other. Whoever goes by any other, falls rather than rises; for it is humility alone which ascends, and which exalts, this alone it is which leads to life." And below; "O, the perverse ambition of the sons of Adam! Though it be a most difficult task to ascend, and most easy to descend, they ascend with ease, and descend with difficulty, ever ready for honours, and the highest offices of the Church, a too formidable weight even for angelic strength. But to follow Thee, Lord Jesus, scarce one is found; scarce one who will submit to be dragged, much less who is willing to be led in the way of Thy commandments."* You see, then, from what has been said, how you may attain to true honour, namely, by the way of humility, and how earnestly this worldly and false honour is to be shunned. But some, perhaps, who are ambitious of honour and knowledge, flatter their passion under the specious pretext of gaining souls, as if they were more enabled in this way to promote the salvation of others. But hear how St. Bernard replies to them; "I wish that every one who thus enters on office, would minister with a faithfulness, if it might be so, proportioned to the confidence with which he has intruded himself. But it is difficult, nay perhaps impossible, that from the bitter root of ambition should proceed the sweet fruit of love."† But thus to despise honours as you ought, demands a singular height of most eminent virtue. And he doubtless stands in need of great strength of mind, who has power and honours conferred upon him, and would use them as he ought.

* Serm. 2, in Asc. Dom. † De Convers. c. xxi.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

OUR LORD PRAYS UPON THE MOUNTAIN; AND WALKS UPON THE SEA.

You have seen in the former chapter how our Lord Jesus compelled His disciples to enter into the ship, and how He went up Himself into the mountain.* Let us complete the account, then, of what our Lord wrought after the miracle of the loaves, for the subject comes next in order, and the circumstances are connected together. I have noticed them separately, that you might understand them the better, and that I might explain more clearly the moral lessons to be drawn from them. As soon as His disciples, then, had entered the ship, He went up Himself into the mountain, and continued there in prayer till the fourth watch of the night, that is, until three parts of the night were past, and the fourth remained. We read on several occasions of our Lord Jesus applying Himself to fervent prayer, and here you see how He spent His nights in it. Behold Him, then, how He prays, and humbles Himself before His Father. He seeks a solitary spot, and goes there alone; He afflicts Himself and keeps long vigils. The faithful Shepherd intercedes for His sheep; for it is not for Himself that He prays, but for us, as our Advocate and Mediator with the Father. He prays, also, to set us an example of praying. He often also warned His disciples of this, and confirmed His words by His example. For He told them that *men ought*

* Mark, vi. 45, &c. John, vi. 15, &c. Matt. xiv. 22, &c.

*always to pray, and not to faint.** And to teach them how importunate prayer obtains what it asks, He set before them the example of the judge and the widow, as you see in St. Luke. He exhorted them also to a confident assurance of obtaining what they prayed for, saying; *Ask, and it shall be given you;* to this end proposing to them another example of the friend, who, on account of the importunity of his friend, lends him as many loaves as he needed, as you see likewise in St. Luke.† And this He said to recommend to us the virtue of prayer. For it is truly a virtue of inestimable price, and of singular power towards obtaining every thing that is profitable, and removing all that is hurtful to us. Would you bear adversity with patience, be a man of prayer. Would you overcome temptations and trials, be a man of prayer. Would you tread under foot all bad affections, be a man of prayer. Would you detect the wiles of Satan, and avoid his subtle deceits, be a man of prayer. Would you live joyfully in the work of God, and tread the path of labour and affliction, be a man of prayer. Would you exercise yourself in a spiritual life, and renounce all worldly cares and fleshly desires, be a man of prayer. Would you get rid of the harassing swarms of vain and busy thoughts, be a man of prayer. Would you enrich your soul with good and holy reflections, with fervent and devout desires, be a man of prayer. Would you stablish your heart with a manly spirit and firm purpose in union with the will of God, be a man of prayer. Would you root out vice from your heart, and clothe it with virtue, be a man of prayer. For in it is received the unction of the Holy Spirit, which teaches all things to the soul. Would you rise to the heights of contemplation, and enjoy the embraces of your

* Luke, xviii. 1. † Luke, xi. 5, &c.

Spouse, be a man of prayer. For it is by the exercise of prayer that the soul attains to the contemplation and relish of heavenly things. You see, then, how great is the power and virtue of prayer. And, in confirmation of what I have said, to omit the testimonies from Holy Scripture, this may serve for a sufficient proof, that we daily see instances of illiterate and simple persons, who by the virtue of prayer have attained to those graces which I have mentioned, and others much greater. Greatly then ought all to give themselves up to prayer, who desire to imitate Christ, and particularly those whose employments leave them a greater share of leisure. I earnestly exhort you, then, gentle reader, whilst you comply with the necessary occupations of your state of life, to make prayer your principal exercise and delight; for nothing ought to give you such pleasure as to dwell in company with our Lord; which you do in prayer. But that you may have the benefit of a better counsellor, hear St. Bernard's sweet words upon this subject. "Those who are devoted to frequent prayer, know well by experience what I say. How often is it that with cold and dry hearts we approach the altar; we apply ourselves to prayer, and persisting in it we are suddenly replenished with grace, our soul is enriched with spiritual joy, our heart from its inmost depths is swollen with the tide of devout delight, and is ready to overflow in sweetness upon all around."* Again, at the beginning of Lent; "As often as I speak of prayer, I seem to hear within my heart some words of human thoughts. For whence is it, that, though we never cease from prayer, scarcely any ever seems to experience the fruits of his prayer? We seem to return from prayer just as we went to it, and no

* Serm. 9, in Cantic.

one answers us a word, or grants us any thing. But give no heed to your own experience; follow the judgment of faith. Faith is ever true; experience often deceitful. What then is the truth of faith, but what the Son of God has promised, who has said; *What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.** Let none of you, my brethren, think slightingly of his own prayer; for I tell you that He to whom we pray does not. Before it has left your mouth, He orders it to be written in His book; and one of two things we may be undoubtedly assured of, that He will give either what we ask, or what He knows will be more profitable to us. For we ourselves know not what to pray for as we ought, but He has compassion upon our ignorance, and graciously receives our prayer, so as to withhold whatever is not profitable to us, or need not be given to us for the present. But our prayer in the meantime will not be barren, if we only do as we are instructed in the Psalm, that is, delight in the Lord; for holy David says; *Delight thou in the Lord, and He shall give thee thy heart's desire.*" † And shortly afterwards; "But consider that he calls those the desires of the heart which are approved by the judgment of reason. Nor have you any ground to complain; but every ground to return thanks with the utmost gratitude; since your God takes such care of you, that, as often as you ask what is unprofitable to you, He does not listen to your wishes, but bestows upon you instead some better gift; like an earthly parent, who willingly gives his child bread upon his asking for it; but if he ask for a knife, which he does not think it necessary for him to have, he does not give it to him, but rather breaks the bread for him himself.

* Mark, xi. 24. † Ps. xxxvii. 4.

Consider, moreover, that the requests of the heart may be comprised under three heads, nor do I see what besides these any faithful ought to desire. Two are of this life; namely, the goods of the body, and the goods of the soul; the third is the blessedness of eternal life. Wonder not that I include the goods of the body among the blessings which we are to ask of God; for bodily goods are no less His than those of the spirit; and, therefore, we must ask and expect from Him whatever is necessary to support us in His service. But our most frequent and fervent prayers must be for the necessities of the soul, that is, for obtaining the grace of God, and virtue. Thus, too, we should pray for eternal life with the most earnest devotion, and with all our hearts; for in that we shall find the full and perfect blessedness both of soul and body." And below; "Let prayer which is for temporal things be confined to what is necessary alone. Let that which is for the virtues of the soul be free from all impurity, and intent only on the will of God. Let that which is for eternal life be with all humility, presuming only on the mercy of God." * Again, "Whoever wishes to pray aright should observe not only the place but the time. The season of fasting is certainly the most suitable; especially when the slumber of night hushes the world around in deep silence; for then the course of prayer is most pure and free. *Arise*, says the prophet, *cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches; pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord.* † How securely does prayer ascend by night, when no witnesses are by, but God and His holy Angel, who presents it at the altar of heaven! With how lovely a light does it beam, tinged with the modest hue of bashful secrecy!

* Serm. 5, in Quadrag. † Lam. ii. 19.

How serene and calm, disturbed by no noise or hurry! In a word, how pure and unalloyed, sullied by no dust of worldly care, tempted by no look of praise or word of flattery! It was for this reason that the spouse in the Canticles, with bashful heed, retired to the secrecy of her chamber, and the stillness of night, to seek her Spouse, the Divine Word, that is to pray. For, in truth, they are one and the same thing. Otherwise you pray not aright, if in prayer you seek aught besides the Word, or except on His account; for all things are contained in Him. In Him are the remedies of our wounds, in Him the supply of our wants, in Him the repairing of our defects, in Him the overflowing source of all our goods; in Him, in short, all find whatever is profitable, becoming, or right. It is needless then to seek aught but the Divine Word, for He contains all things in Himself. For even though we seem at times, when necessary, to ask with freedom for temporal blessings, if it be for the sake of the Word, as it should be, that we ask them, we cannot be said to ask them so much, as the Word, on whose account it is that we ask them." * You have heard then the beautiful words of St. Bernard, that heavenly contemplative, gifted with so refined a relish for the spiritual sweets of prayer. Dwell on them if you will, that you may taste their hidden flavour; for to this end it is, that I gladly intersperse his words in this little work, because they are not only full of spirit and penetrating to the heart, but of wondrous beauty also and powerfully moving to the service of God. For he was possessed of eloquence, and full of the spirit of wisdom, and of eminent holiness. Endeavour, therefore, I entreat you, to imitate him, and to put his advice in

* Serm. 86, in Cantic.

practice, which is my reason for bringing him so often before you.

But let us return to our Lord Jesus. Whilst, then, our Lord was praying upon the mountain, His disciples were upon the sea in great affliction and distress; for the wind was contrary, and the ship was tossed by the tempest and the waves. Behold, then, and compassionate them, for they are in great tribulation and distress. For the storm has overtaken them: it is night; and they are without their Lord. But in the fourth watch of the night, our Lord came down from the mountain, and walking upon the sea drew near to them. Here, then, contemplate Him, as your God, and see how, wearied with His long watching, and continued prayer, He comes down alone, at night, from the toilsome and perchance rocky mountain, bare-footed, and how He walks upon the sea with firm step, as upon the dry land. Thus did the creature acknowledge its Creator. But when He drew near the ship His disciples were frightened, and cried out, supposing Him to be a spirit: but our loving Lord, unwilling that they should be any longer distressed, relieved their fears, saying; *It is I; be not afraid.** Then Peter, trusting in the power of our Lord, at His bidding began likewise to walk upon the sea: but soon failing in courage he began to sink, when our Lord put out His hand and saved him. The old commentary upon this passage says; "Our Lord bade him walk upon the sea, that He might show His Divine power; and He allowed him to sink, that he might not be proud, and put himself on an equality with God." Our Lord, then, entered the ship; and the storm ceased, and all was calm. The disciples reverently receive Him, and were in much joy, and continued in great peace. Regard

* Matt. xiv. 27.

Him well, and His disciples, in all these circumstances which I have mentioned, for they are very beautiful and rich in subjects of devout meditation. From this action, then, of our Lord, you may draw this moral reflection, that He deals thus with us every day in a spiritual sense, suffering His elect to be afflicted in this world, both inwardly and outwardly, for He *scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.** For those who are without chastisement, as the Apostle says, are bastards and not sons.† It is good for us to be in tribulation and affliction here, for we are disciplined thereby, and acquire new virtues and preserve those we already have, and, what is more than all, we gain thereby a good hope of future and eternal rewards. And, therefore, we ought not to be cast down or to be impatient under afflictions; but rather to desire and love them. But in consequence of the great advantage of tribulations being so little understood by most, they appear to them difficult and insupportable. But that you may be better instructed, and bear them patiently, I bring forward, as usual, the authority of St. Bernard. "Tribulation," he says, "is useful, for it works out trial, and leads us to glory. *I am with him in trouble;*‡ says the Psalmist. Let us render thanks then to the Father of Mercies, who is with us in trouble, and *comforteth us in all our tribulation.*§ For tribulation is necessary, and is changed into glory, and terminates in joy; a long joy, I say, yea a great, a full joy, which no one shall take from us. Tribulation is necessary; and this necessity brings forth our crown. Let us not despise, brethren, the small seed; for out of it springs forth abundant fruit. It is perhaps tasteless, perhaps bitter, perhaps but a grain of mustard seed. *We look not at the*

* Heb. xii. 6. † Ibid. 8.
‡ Ps. xci. 15. § 2 Cor. i. 4.

things which are seen in it, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." * And afterwards, again, "*I am with him in trouble,*† says the Lord, and I will require no other merit than tribulation. *It is good for me to hold me fast by God.* And not only so, but also *to put my trust in the Lord God,*‡ for *I will deliver him and bring him to honour; yea, I am with him in trouble.*§ *My delights,* He says, are *with the sons of men.* ‖ He came upon earth, that He might be *nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart;* ¶ that He might be with us in our trouble. But there shall come a time when *we shall* ourselves *be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord,*** provided we in the meantime are careful to have Him with us here. It is good for me, O Lord, to be in trouble, so that Thou only be with me; yea, far better than to reign, to feast, to glory without Thee. *The furnace proveth the potter's vessels, and the trial of affliction just men.*†† What are we afraid of? Why do we hold back? Why do we fly from this furnace? Does the fire rage? the Lord is with us in trouble. *If God be with us, who can be against us?*‡‡ If He deliver us, who is there that shall take us out of His hand? Lastly, if He glorify us, who shall humble us?" §§ Again, "We glory therefore not only in hope, but in tribulation also. *Most gladly therefore,* says the Apostle, *will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*‖‖ Truly desirable is that infirmity

* 2 Cor. iv. 18. † Ps. xci. 16. ‡ Ps. lxxiii. 27.
§ Ps. xci. 15. ‖ Prov. viii. 31. ¶ Ps. xxxiv. 18.
** 1 Thess. iv. 17. †† *Vid.* Ecclus. xxvii. 5.
‡‡ *Vid.* Rom. viii. 31. §§ Serm. 17, in Ps. Qui habitat.
‖‖ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

which is recompensed by the power of Christ. Who will grant me not only to be weak, but even to faint and to be utterly lost to myself, that so I may be strong in the power of the Lord of power? For His *strength is made perfect in weakness.* Finally, he says, *When I am weak, then am I strong.*"* † Again; "It is for this reason that the spouse in the Canticles calls her Beloved, not a bundle but a little bundle,‡ because she regards every labour and pain as light for the love of Him. Truly, little; for unto us a Little One is born.§ Truly little; for *the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*‖ *For our light affliction,* he says, *which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*¶ That then shall one day be to us a mighty pile of glory, which is now but a little bundle of myrrh. Is He not little, whose yoke is easy and burden light? Not that it is light in itself; for the bitterness of death is indeed a sharp and severe trial, yet love makes it seem light and easy."** Again, upon the verse, *From the arrow that flieth by day;* "If we cast our eyes upon the whole body of the Church, we may easily observe that her spiritual members are far more fiercely assailed than those which are carnal. This is the work of our proud and ever envious and malicious foe, always to direct his most violent attack against the most perfect, according to the words of the Prophet; His meat is dainty.†† Nay, and it is the dispensation of Divine Providence that it should be so, who does not suffer the more imperfect to

* 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10. † Serm. 25, in Cantic.
‡ *Vid.* Song of Sol. i. 13. Fasciculus. Vulg.
§ *Vid.* Is. ix. 6. Parvulus enim natus est nobis. Vulg.
‖ Rom. viii. 18. ¶ 2 Cor. iv. 17. ** Serm. 43, in. Cantic.
†† *Vid.* Hab. i. 16. Cibus ejus electus. Vulg.

be tempted above that they are able to bear, but with the temptation also makes a way to escape;* and for the more perfect prepares not only more glorious, but also more numerous, triumphs over the enemy?" And shortly afterwards; "With far greater care and redoubled craft does the Enemy busy himself to wound us on the right side than on the left, nor is he so anxious to assail the body itself, as to weaken it by wasting the very soul." And again; "We must direct our most obstinate resistance to those points, where the pressure is most severe, where the weight of the war hangs most heavily, and the whole issue of the struggle is centred. There it is that it must be decided whether we shall be conquered and reduced to a miserable and shameful slavery, or conquer and be crowned with everlasting glory." And shortly afterwards; "This is the great grace and mercy of God towards His servants; this is His regard for His elect; that, whilst He appears to overlook their left wing in the battle, He heads and supports the right. This made the Prophet say; *I have set God always before me; for He is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall.*"† Again; "Oh! that Thou wert always on my right hand, good Jesu! and ever heldest me by it! For I know and am sure, that no adversity shall hurt me, if no iniquity has dominion over me. Let my left meanwhile be bruised and harassed, assailed by injuries, torn with insults; I willingly expose it, so long as I am guarded by Thee, and Thou art Thyself my protection upon my right hand."‡ Again; "It is one thing to be actuated by virtue, another to be ruled by wisdom; one thing to be absolute in virtue, another to be delighted in sweetness. For though there is power in wisdom, and sweetness in virtue,

* 1 Cor. x. 13. † Ps. xvi. 9. ‡ Serm. 7, in Ps. Qui habitat.

yet, to give words their proper meaning, it is vigour which belongs to virtue, and serenity of soul, with a certain spiritual sweetness, is the mark of wisdom. It was this sweetness, I believe, which the Apostle meant, when, after many exhortations to the pursuit of virtue, he added, that wisdom consists in sweetness in the Holy Ghost.* To resist, therefore, to repel force by force, which is the proper province of virtue, is an honour indeed, but a laborious honour. For the painful defence of honour is a different thing from the quiet possession of it. It is not the same thing to act with virtue, and to enjoy the fruits of it. What virtue toils for, wisdom enjoys; and what wisdom disposes, and resolves, virtue moderates and carries out. *The wisdom of a learned man cometh by opportunity of leisure,*† says the Wise man; the leisure, then, of wisdom is business, and the more leisure it has, the more active it is in its own sphere. On the other hand, virtue shines with a brighter lustre the more it is exercised, and it is in action that it is proved. And if any one should define wisdom to be the love of virtue, I do not see that he would be far wrong. Now, where love is, there is no labour, but sweetness. And therefore, perhaps, wisdom is called *sapientia,* from *sapor,* or relish, as a kind of quality or ingredient added to virtue, which imparts a sweetness to what was before of itself tasteless and repulsive. Neither should I think it amiss to define wisdom a relish of good." And lower down; "It belongs to virtue then to bear troubles bravely; to wisdom, to rejoice in them. To be strong of heart and to tarry the Lord's leisure,‡ is the part of virtue; to *taste and see how gracious the Lord is,*§ is that of wisdom.

* 2 Cor. vi. 6. In suavitate in Spiritu Sancto. Vulg.
† Ecclus. xxxviii. 24. ‡ *Vid.* Ps. xxvii. 16. § Ps. xxxiv. 8.

And that the properties of both may be the better shown from a consideration of natural gifts; modesty of mind is a proof of wisdom; constancy, of virtue. And right it is that wisdom should follow virtue, since virtue is as it were a strong foundation, upon which wisdom builds her house."* Again; "Happy is he, who so orders the sufferings of his body with a view to righteousness, as to suffer all for the sake of the Son of God; without murmuring in his heart, and with thanksgiving and praises in his mouth. He who carries himself thus, properly takes up his bed and walks. Our bed is our body, in which before we were languishing, slaves to our desires and lusts. We then take it up, when we compel it to obey the spirit."† Again; "Truly manifold is the Spirit, who inspires in so many ways the sons of men, that there is no one who is hidden from His heat.‡ He is given to them for use, for miracles, for salvation, for assistance, for comfort, for fervour. For the use of life He is given to the good and bad, bestowing all blessings most abundantly upon the worthy and unworthy alike; so that He appears in this case to observe no rule of distinction; and therefore he would be truly ungrateful, who should fail to acknowledge these benefits of the Spirit. He is given for miracles in the signs and wonders and various mighty works which He shows forth by the hands of some. He it is, who is ever raising up again in His Church the ancient miracles, and thus, by the new ones which He daily manifests, confirms our faith in the old. But, because some receive even this grace without profit to themselves, He is given in the third place for salvation, when we return to the Lord our God with our whole heart. Moreover, He is given for aid, when in

* Prov. ix. 1. † Serm. in fer. iv. Hebd. Sanctæ. ‡ Ps. xix. 6.

every struggle with our enemies He assists our weakness. And when He beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God;* that inspiration is given us for our comfort. He is also given for fervour, when, breathing strongly into the hearts of the perfect, He kindles so powerful a flame of Divine love, that we not only rejoice in the hope of the glory of the children of God,† but glory in tribulations also, counting contumely glory, disgrace joy, and triumphing with exultation in contempt. To all of us, then, as I trust, the Spirit is given for salvation; but He is not given to all alike for fervour. There are but few replenished with this Spirit; very few who covet His presence with holy jealousy. We are content with our own narrowness; and neither labour to breathe that liberty, nor even aspire after it at all."‡

You have seen, then, gentle reader, the many and beautiful reasons which the eloquent St. Bernard gives to show how profitable tribulations are to us. Do not wonder, then, that our Lord should permit His disciples, whom He loved so tenderly, to be harassed with tempests, knowing how greatly they would be benefited by them. For we read on many occasions of their ship being violently tossed by waves and contrary winds, but never of its being sunk by them. Endeavour then to profit by these lessons, and so to strengthen and order your heart, that under all adversities and contradictions which you may meet with, you may keep yourself patient and cheerful, and walk diligently in the way of the Spirit, that so, filled with His fervour, you may even desire to suffer tribulations for the love of our Lord Jesus, who in Himself and His friends has chosen and pointed out this lofty way.

* Rom. viii. 16. † Rom. v. 2. ‡ Serm. 3, in festo Pentecost.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

OUR LORD HEALS THE DAUGHTER OF THE WOMAN OF CANAAN; HOW OUR GUARDIAN ANGELS FAITHFULLY ASSIST US.

As our Lord Jesus was going about, labouring in preaching and in healing the sick, there came to Him a woman of Canaan, that is, of the race of the Gentiles and not of the Jews, beseeching Him to deliver her daughter, who was grievously vexed with a devil.* For so great was her faith that she firmly believed He was able to do it. And though our Lord answered her not a word, she still persisted, and persevered in crying out, and beseeching Him to have mercy upon her, insomuch that His disciples intreated for her. And upon our Lord's answering that it was *not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs*, she with increased humility replied, that she might at least, like the dogs, eat of the crumbs; and thus she deserved to be heard. Contemplate here our Lord and His disciples, and for this purpose have recourse to the general rules for meditation which I have given you above. Consider, however, at the same time the virtues of this woman, and turn them to full account for your own spiritual profit; they were mainly three. First, her faith; which was so great as to extend its virtue even to her daughter, and for which she was herself praised by our Lord. The second was her persevering prayer; which was not only persevering, but even importunate. This importunity is acceptable to our Lord; nay, He invites it, as you may

* Matt. xv. 22.

have learnt from a former chapter. The third was her profound humility, for she neither refused to be called a dog, nor esteemed herself worthy to be named among the children, or to receive a whole loaf, but was content to eat of the crumbs. Wherefore she greatly humbled herself, and thus obtained what she sought. In like manner you may most certainly believe, if with a perfect, faithful, and pure heart you persevere in prayer, and humble yourself before God, counting yourself unworthy of the least blessing at His hands, that you shall obtain whatever you seek. And as the Apostles prayed for the woman of Canaan, so too shall your Angel pray for you, and present your prayer to God. On this subject hear what St. Bernard says; "Often when my soul has been sighing, yea, praying without intermission, and tormenting herself with anxiety for her heavenly Spouse, and He the greatly desired, after being so long sought for, has in His own mercy deigned to meet her, I have thought she might, from her own experience, say with Jeremiah; *The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him.** Nay, and His Angel, the companion of the heavenly Spouse, to whom He has assigned this very office of securing and presiding at this secret and mutual salutation; this Angel, I say, with what a bounding heart does he share the joy; with what delight, with what transport, turning to our Lord, does he say, 'I render thanks to Thee, O Lord of Majesty, because Thou hast given her her heart's desire, and hast not denied her the request of her lips.'† He it is who sedulously and in every place attends upon the soul, and ceases not to solicit and admonish her with continual suggestions; saying, *Delight thou in the Lord, and He*

* Lam. iii. 25. † *Vid.* Ps. xxi. 2.

*shall give thee thy heart's desire.** And, again; *Hope thou in the Lord, and keep His way.*† *Though* He *tarry, wait for* Him; *because* He *will surely come,* He *will not tarry.*‡ But to our Lord he says; *Like as the hart desireth the water brooks, so longeth* this faithful soul *after Thee, O God.*§ She hath desired Thee in the night, and Thy spirit is within her heart. Unto Thee does she wake at break of day. And again; All the day long doth she stretch forth her hands unto Thee.‖ *Send her away, for she crieth after* Thee. ¶ *Turn Thee again, O Lord, at the last, and be gracious unto Thy servant.*** *Look down from heaven, behold and visit* this desolate one.†† The faithful paranymph, conscious without envy of this mutual love, seeks not anything for himself, but only the glory of his Lord. He is ever passing between the heavenly Spouse and His beloved, offering her vows, and bringing back His gifts, enkindling her to love and moving Him to mercy. Sometimes too, though rarely, he presents them to each other, either transporting her into His presence, or inviting Him to her. For he has familiar access and is well known in the palace of heaven; nor does he fear a repulse, for he beholds daily the face of the Father."‡‡

You see, then, how faithfully our Guardian Angels wait upon us; and I will take this occasion of saying somewhat more about them. I should wish you then to understand, that we ought to practise great reverence towards them, and daily to praise and honour them, render them thanks, and as in their presence, seeing they are always with us, to allow ourselves in nothing shameful or wrong, either in thought, word, or deed. And this

* Ps. xxxvii. 4. † Ibid. 35. ‡ Hab. ii. 3. § Ps. xlii. 1.
‖ *Vid.* Ps. lxxxviii. 9. ¶ Matt. xv. 23. ** *Vid.* Ps. xc. 13.
†† Ps. lxxx. 14. ‡‡ Serm. 31, in Cantic.

same warning is given by St. Bernard in his sermon on the Psalm "Whoso dwelleth." "He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." How ought this saying to fill you with reverence, to inflame you with devotion, and to inspire you with confidence! Reverence at such a presence, devotion for such good-will, confidence in such a guardianship. Tread cautiously when Angels are by, for charge is given them over all your ways. In every resting-place and in every corner of the street, demean yourself with reverence towards your Angel. Dare not do in his presence what you would not dare do in his sight." And a little after he says; "They are present to you, then, not merely as being with you, but as acting for you. They are present for protection, they are present for profit. What wilt you render unto the Lord, for all the benefits that He hath done unto you? His alone the honour and glory. And why His alone? Even because He it is, who hath thus given them in charge, and from whom is every good and perfect gift. Notwithstanding, though it is He who gave the charge, yet it is they who obey Him with such affection, and minister to us in so great necessities; let us not then be unthankful to them. Let us rather be filled with devotion and gratitude towards these our princely guardians; let us love them in turn, and honour them as much as we can and ought."* Thus far St. Bernard. In the foregoing narrative you have commended to your meditation the obedience of the Angels, their ministry, and the efficacy of prayer. Study to fix your mind on these points, and show your Angel-Guardians all the reverence in your power.

* Serm. 12, in Psalm. Qui habitat.

CHAPTER XXXV.

OUR LORD'S WORDS A CAUSE OF OFFENCE.

Marvel not that our words and actions should often be a cause of offence, no matter how well and faithfully spoken or done, since this oftentimes happened to our Lord Himself, who could not do amiss. Thus, when, on a certain occasion, the Pharisees inquired of our Lord, why His disciples eat with unwashen hands; our Lord sternly replied, and chid them, because they had no regard for inward holiness.* At which they were offended; yet the Lord was not moved. Another time, when He was teaching His heavenly truths in the synagogue, some of His disciples, like men of carnal minds as they were, understood Him not, and withdrew. Whereupon He said to the Twelve, *Will ye also go away?* And Peter answered for himself and the rest, *Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*† Consider Him, then, under the forementioned circumstances, and those of a like description; how He spake with power, and taught the Truth, nothing moved by the offence of the wicked and foolish. It is to be noted, therefore, in the first place, that we ought not to withdraw from acts of virtue and justice on account of the offence which some may take at them. Secondly, that we should give more heed to inward purity, than to outward reputation,‡ as our Lord elsewhere expressly teaches us

* Matt. xv. 1, &c. Mark, vii. 1, &c.
† John, vi. 66, &c. ‡ Luke, xi. 39.

in St. Luke. Again; that we ought to live a spiritual life, so that our Lord's words may not seem strange to us, as they did to those disciples, who, when Christ said, according to St. John, *Except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man,* and the rest, could not bear the words, but withdrew. Rather let us recognize them as the words of eternal life, that, together with the Twelve, we may imitate Him perfectly.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ON THE RECOMPENSE OF THOSE WHO FORSAKE ALL.

When the faithful and wise disciple Simon Peter inquired of our Lord Jesus concerning the recompense of himself and his brethren, our Lord replied, that they who leave all to follow Him shall receive an hundred-fold in this world, and, in the world to come, life everlasting.* Observe this recompense well, and rejoice with exceeding joy; and give thanks and praise to our Lord with all the affection of your mind, for having enabled you to trade to so good an account, as to receive to your hand for every pound you lay out, an hundred, and life everlasting in addition. Now this "hundred-fold" is not of carnal goods, but spiritual; that is to say, of inward consolations, and of those virtues which we acquire, not by teaching, but by experience. When the mind acquires a true relish for the graces of poverty, chastity, patience, and the rest, does it not, I ask you, receive an hundred-

* Matt. xix. 27.

fold? And if it mount yet higher, and be favoured with a visit from its Spouse, and exult in His Presence, does it not then receive above a thousand times more than all, whatever it may have been, and however dispensed, which it has given up for Him? See then how true this is which the Truth hath spoken, and that He fails not in His promise of rendering an hundred-fold in this life, and that not once only, but again and again, to the soul which has devoted herself to Him, so as to affect her in such way that she esteems not only what she has relinquished, but even all the whole world, as dung in comparison of Him whom she seeks to win. And now, that you may be somewhat more perfectly instructed concerning this "hundred-fold," hear what St. Bernard says upon it. "If perchance some secular should say to me, 'Show me this hundred-fold, which you promise, and I will readily forsake all.' What have I to show him? Faith has no excellence which is capable of proof from human reason." You say, you will believe a man showing, when you will not believe the Truth promising; you may try the balance, but will find it wanting. Except you believe, you will not understand. It is the *hidden Manna*, which, in the Apocalypse of St. John, is promised to *him that overcometh*, as a *new name which no man knoweth, saving him that receiveth it*."* And a little after he continues; "Doth not he possess all, who hath all things working for his good?† Hath not he an hundred-fold of all, who is filled with the Holy Ghost, and beareth Christ in his breast? Rather is this Indwelling of the Spirit, this Presence of Christ, far, far more than an 'hundred-fold.' O Lord, how great is the multitude of Thy sweetness *which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee,*

* Rev. ii. 17. † *Vid.* Rom. viii. 28.

and perfected *for them that put their trust in Thee!* * Behold, how this holy soul 'inditeth' its experience of God's abundant sweetness, how it multiplieth words with a joyful eagerness of expression. 'How great,' it says, is the multitude. This 'hundred-fold,' then, is the adoption of sons, the first-fruits of the Spirit, the delights of charity, the glories of experience, the Kingdom of God within us. It is not *meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.*† Joy, verily, not merely in the hope of glory, but in tribulations. This is that fire which Christ would have to be mightily kindled.‡ This is that virtue which made Andrew embrace the cross, Lawrence smile upon the torturers, Stephen, in the very midst of death, fall down on his knees and pray for those who were stoning him; this is that peace which Christ bequeathed to his own, when He said, *My peace I give unto you.*§ For grace and peace is to His elect.‖ The peace, verily, of the Father, and the gift of glory to come. This is that peace, which *passeth all understanding;* ¶ and wherewith all that delighteth under the sun, and all that is desirable in the world, is not to be compared. This is that grace of devotion, and unction teaching all things, which whoso hath experienced it knoweth, and whoso hath not experienced it knoweth not; which none knoweth but he who possesseth it." Thus far St. Bernard. Rejoice, then, and be exceeding glad, as I have already bidden you, and render thanks, since you are called to receive this "hundred-fold;" and often enter this paradise, as you may, if you will but be diligent in prayer.

* Ps. xxxi. 19. † Rom. xiv. 17. ‡ *Vid.* Luke, xii. 49.
§ John, xiv. 27. ‖ *Vid.* Wisdom, iii. 9. ¶ Phil. iv. 7.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

OUR LORD INQUIRES OF THE DISCIPLES WHAT MEN SAY OF HIM.

Our Lord Jesus, coming into the parts of Cæsarea Philippi, inquired of His disciples as to what men said of Him; and again, what they themselves thought upon the subject, with other matters. First one and then another answered, *Some say,* and the rest. Then Peter said, for himself and the others; *Thou art Christ the Son of the Living God.** Our Lord answered him, *Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church.* And then gave him, for himself and his successors, the keys of binding and loosing upon earth. Contemplate him then, and the others with him, according to the general rules I have before given. And observe, that this very Peter, whom on this occasion He so exalted, a little while after he called 'Satan,' when, for the too carnal love he bore Him, he would have dissuaded Him from His passion.† And in like manner do you, with your Lord, account them your adversaries, who, with a view to bodily satisfaction, would divert you from the exercises of wholesome discipline, and the pursuit of your spiritual good.

* Matt. xvi. 13, &c. † Ib. v. 23.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD ON THE MOUNT.

Our Lord, having taken with Him Peter, James, and John, went up into the Mount Tabor, and was transfigured before them, manifesting Himself to them in a glorious form.* There came, too, Moses and Elias, who spake to Him of His passion. They said, "Lord, it befitteth not that Thou die, since one drop of Thy Blood sufficeth to redeem the world." But our Lord Jesus answered, "The Good Shepherd giveth His Life for the Sheep ;† thus it behoveth Me to do." The Holy Spirit, too, was there, in the form of a bright cloud, and the Voice of the Father was heard in the cloud, saying, *This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* The disciples fell to the ground; and when they waked up, they saw none but the Lord Jesus. Consider well the forementioned circumstances, and render yourself present at them, for it is a truly magnificent occasion.

* Matt. xvii. 1, &c. Mark, ix. 2, &c. Luke, ix. 28.

† *Vid.* John, x. 11.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

OUR LORD CASTETH THE BUYERS AND SELLERS OUT OF THE TEMPLE.

On two occasions* our Lord cast the buyers and sellers out of the Temple, and it is reckoned among His greatest miracles. For whereas at other times they thought scorn of Him, now they all fled before Him. And, though they were many in number, yet did they not defend themselves, but suffered Him, without assistance from any other, to drive them all forth with a few small cords. And this was because He manifested Himself to them in so terrible a form. For He was consumed with a vehement zeal, on seeing His Father's house dishonoured by them, and so inflicted on them this exemplary punishment in that place especially where God ought above all to be honoured. Consider Him well, and compassionate Him, for He is Himself full of the pain of compassion. And yet fear Him withal. For we also, of His great and signal bounty, are accounted the Temple of God; and if we entangle ourselves with worldly affairs, as these men did, when we ought to be ever ready for His praise, good reason have we to fear lest He, in His indignation, should cast us out; yea, and we do fear it. Now, if you would not be tormented by these fears, you must not venture by any means upon engrossing yourself with the cares and business of the world. And do not employ yourself upon frivolous works, which take up the time due to God's praises, and belong to the pomps of the world.

* John, ii. 13. &c. Matt. xxi. 12, &c.

CHAPTER XL.

OUR LORD HEALS THE SICK MAN AT THE POOL OF BETHESDA.

THERE was in Jerusalem a pool,* in which the sheep were washed that were intended for the sacrifices. There is a tradition that it was in this afterwards that the wood of the holy Cross lay hid. Every year at a certain season the water was troubled by an Angel, and whoever then first stepped in after the troubling of the water, was healed; for which reason great numbers of sick persons continually remained near it, waiting for the moving of the water. Now there was amongst them a sick man, lying in his bed, who had been a paralytic for thirty-eight years, whom our Lord Jesus healed on the Sabbath-day. Contemplate Him, how humbly He goes to the sick man, and talks with him as He was wont. In this act of our Lord there are three things for you to notice. First, that as our Lord here asked the sick man, whether he wished to be healed, so without our consent He will not save us, and sinners are without excuse for not consenting to the will of the Lord, and their own salvation. For, according to St. Augustine; "He who made thee without thee, will not justify thee without thee." Secondly, we ought to take care, that we do not fall back from our Lord, for, if after being healed by Him, we relapse, our ingratitude will deserve to be punished still more severely, as our Lord said to the sick man; *Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come*

* John, v. 1, &c.

unto thee. Thirdly, observe that the wicked turn everything to their own loss, as the good do to their own gain. For when the man that was healed was carrying his bed, and the Jews told him that it was not lawful to do so on the Sabbath-day, his answer was; *He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed and walk.* Upon this they did not say, Who is He that made thee whole? Thus they gladly laid hold of what they could carp at, but took no notice of the good work which called for their praise. Such is ever the conduct of carnal men, who put a bad construction upon everything they see, and so, as it were, lose on every occasion. But those who lead a spiritual life refer all to the praise and glory of God, whether it be prosperity or adversity, and never doubt but that everything is ordered by Him for the best, knowing that it is either through His holy will or permission, and therefore interpret everything in the best way, in conformity with the doctrine of St. Bernard, who says; "Beware of prying curiously into the conduct of your neighbour, or judging rashly of it. Even should you see him do something wrong, do not judge him; if you cannot excuse his act, excuse at least his intention; attribute it to ignorance, to inadvertence, to accident. But if the thing be so certain that there is no other account to be given of it, nevertheless persuade yourself and say; 'The temptation was too strong. What should I have done myself, had I been in like manner exposed to its power?'"* And that the good reap benefit from everything, even from their own and other men's sins, from things the most hurtful, and even from the works of the Devil, St. Bernard thus shows; "Though the irrational and animal part is not capable of attaining

* Serm. 40, in Cantic.

to spiritual things, yet by the bodily service which it renders it certainly helps those to obtain them, who turn the use of all temporal things to the eternal advantage of their souls, using this world as not abusing it."*† And again; "Though there are some creatures, which in their use are found inconvenient and even hurtful, and destructive to the temporal welfare of men; yet there are ways in which they *work together for good to them who are the called according to His purpose*,‡ if not by yielding food, or ministering to their service, yet certainly by employing their mind according to that discipline of wisdom which is ever at hand to help every one that uses his reason, and whereby the invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.§ For even the Devil and his wicked crew, ever malicious as they are in their will, and desirous of hurting us, if we be but zealous lovers of good, are so far from being able to injure us, that they rather benefit us, and against their will work together for good to those who are good."‡

See, then, how those who lead a spiritual life interpret everything in good part, and by so doing turn it to good account. Do you then lead such a life; and all things shall work for your good. The thought of this will enable you to bear tribulations and trials, and by daily exercise you shall obtain at length such peace and tranquillity of mind, that you shall seldom be disturbed at anything, and the saying of the Wise man shall be verified in you; "Whatsoever shall befal the just man, it shall not make him sad."‖

* *Vid.* 1 Cor. vii. 31. † Serm. 5, in Cantic. ‡ Rom. viii. 28.
§ Rom. i. 20. ‖ *Vid.* Prov. xii. 21.

CHAPTER XLI.

OUR LORD'S DISCIPLES PLUCK THE EARS OF CORN.*

On a certain Sabbath, the disciples of our Lord Jesus being an hungered, and not having whence to procure food, went through the fields of corn, and, plucking the ears, bruised them in their hands and eat them. Whereupon they were reproved by the Pharisees, who said that this was not lawful on the Sabbath-day. But our Lord defended them; and Himself did many things on the Sabbath-day, as I have related above in the case of the man with the withered hand, who was cured by Him. Do you then contemplate the disciples, and compassionate them in this their strait; although they themselves performed this action gladly, out of their love of poverty, which their Lord and Master had commended as the first among the virtues and beatitudes. What a thing is it to consider that the princes of the world, in the very presence of its Creator, were reduced to such a pitch of poverty and distress as to be obliged thus to sustain life after the manner of the very brute cattle! But our Lord turned His eye upon them and compassionated them, for He loved them most tenderly. And yet He rejoiced also, both on their account, whom He saw thus earning such great reward to themselves, and on ours, to whom He was bequeathing such an example.

[Here follows in the original a digression upon the cultivation of holy poverty in the monastic state.—Ed.]

* Matt. xii. 1, &c.

CHAPTER XLII.

ON THE SEVERAL MINISTRATIONS OF MARY AND MARTHA.

When our Lord, on one occasion, was at Bethany, in the house of Martha and Mary, these holy damsels, who loved Him with the utmost fervour of their affection, entertained Him with reverence and great gladness. As to Martha, Mary's sister, she was unremitting in her exertions to prepare Him and His disciples as honourable a banquet as she was able. Mary, however, placed herself at our Lord's feet. And when our Lord, who would never be idle, addressed to her, as His manner was, the words of eternal life, she fixed all her eyes and ears upon Him, and delighted herself in His words to a degree past expression; neither could she think of aught besides. Now Martha, on her part, took this amiss, and asked her Lord to compel her sister to take part in her own laborious ministrations. But she received an answer contrary to her wishes, and was told that Martha had chosen the better part. Then Mary, who had been as it were entranced in our Lord's words, was frightened at her sister's impetuosity, and starting, as from a sleep, had bent her eyes on the ground, and become motionless. After our Lord's answer, however, she resumed her place with more composure and happiness. Then, the repast being ready, and our Lord discontinuing His speech, she straightway gets up, brings water in her hands, and then seating herself near Him, serves Him with the utmost diligence. Look well at our Lord as He enters the house, and see with what inexpressible joy

they receive Him; and so follow out the remainder of the meditation in the several points above mentioned, for indeed they are most beautiful.

[Here follows a digression, occupying several chapters, on the Method and Kinds of Contemplation, taken chiefly from the writings of St. Bernard. Portions of the chapter on the Contemplation of our Lord's Humanity will be found among the preliminary matter of this volume.—Ed.]

CHAPTER XLIII.

ON THE PARABLE OF THE HUSBANDMEN IN THE VINEYARD, IN WHICH OUR LORD WARNS THE JEWS OF THE TRANSFER OF HIS CHURCH TO THE GENTILES.*

Our Lord and Redeemer, in His zeal for the salvation of souls, for whom He had come to lay down His own life, strove by every means to draw them towards Him, and to rescue them from the jaws of their adversaries. To this end he sometimes employed sweet and lowly discourses; sometimes reproof and sterner words; sometimes examples and similitudes; sometimes signs and wonders; sometimes threats and terrors; varying His method, and saving remedies, according to the difference of places, times, and characters of hearers. In the present case, He made use, against the rulers and Pharisees, of severe words and a terrible example, yet one so just and incontrovertible, that they were constrained to give sentence against themselves. He puts before them

* Matt. xxi. 33, &c. Mark, xii. 1. Luke, xx. 9.

a parable of workmen in a vineyard, who killed for their own profit the servants of their Lord in succession, and last of all, His Son. And, then, on His asking what punishment they deserved at the hands of the Master whom they had so treated, they answer, *He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out His vineyard unto other husbandmen.* Jesus, accepting this answer, drew from it an inference to this effect; "Thus shall the *Kingdom of God* (that is to say, the Church,) *be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof,*" namely, the Gentiles, among whom are we, and the whole Church. He introduced also the figure of the corner-stone, which signifies Himself, and which was to fall upon the Jews and grind them to powder. When they understood that the parable concerned themselves, far from being corrected, they became the more enraged; for their malice had blinded them. Contemplate Him, then, in the foregoing, how humbly He sits among the Pharisees, yet how He speaks with authority and power, and announces to them their own destruction in the greatness of His strength.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE JEWS SEEK TO ENTANGLE OUR LORD IN HIS TALK.

WHILE our Lord in these many ways is striving to effect the salvation of the Jews, they, on the contrary, in many ways also, are striving to detract from Him, and to compass His destruction. Thus they thought to deceive

Him, but they failed in their search.* Again, they sent, of set purpose, their disciples with the partizans of Herod the king, to inquire whether it were lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or no.† Their design was, thus to render Him odious, either to Cæsar, or to the Jewish populace, as if He could give no answer except against Himself. But this Searcher of hearts, fully aware of all their malice, replied that they ought to "render unto Cæsar the things of Cæsar, and unto God the things of God," at the same time calling them "hypocrites," because they used fair speeches with a deceitful purpose. And thus, foiled in their object, they withdrew in disgrace. Behold them attentively, according to the general advice given you above, and consider this also, that it is not our Lord's will that persons in authority and the lords of this world should be defrauded of their due. It follows, therefore, that not to pay tolls, and taxes, and tenths, and such other contributions as are duly and justly levied by temporal authorities, is a sin, and a thing forbidden.

CHAPTER XLV.

OUR LORD RESTORES A BLIND MAN TO SIGHT AT JERICHO.‡

Our most merciful Lord, who, of his infinite love, came down from the Bosom of His Father for our salvation, when He knew that the time of His passion was draw-

* *Vid.* Ps. lxiv. 5, 6. Defecerunt scrutantes scrutinio. Vulg.
† Matt. xxii. 16. ‡ Luke, xviii. 35, &c.

ing on, prepared Himself for it, and directed His steps towards Jerusalem in order to undergo it. Already of His Divine Foreknowledge had He predicted it, but they understood Him not. When then He was approaching Jericho, a certain blind man, who sat by the way-side begging, when he was told by the multitude that He was passing by, began to cry out vehemently for mercy, and, though chid by the populace, was nothing abashed, nor would he hold his peace. Our Lord Jesus, whose attention was drawn to his faith and fervour, caused him to be brought near Him, and said, *What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?* The blind man answered, *Lord, that I may receive my sight.* Which request our pitiful Lord was pleased to grant, saying, *Receive thy sight.* And so He restored light to his eyes. Behold, then, our Lord Jesus with all attention, and consider His courtesy towards this blind man. Meditate, also, in this place, upon the power of faith and prayer, and how that importunity in prayer is not displeasing to God, as you have before learned from the woman of Canaan. In the same chapter, also, He teaches, that *men ought always to pray, and not to faint,** giving as an example the judge from whom the widow obtained her suit by importunity. Elsewhere, again, He draws an example from one who granted bread at night upon the importunity of the petitioner.† The same does our Lord to those who continue instant in prayer, granting them whatever they ask of God for right ends and in a fitting way. Thus He says to each, "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" and then doth it. Yea, often He performs more than is asked, and than men dare ask, as you find in the instance of Zacchæus, of whom we

* Luke, xviii. 1, &c. † Luke, xi. 5.

shall speak in the next chapter. Count it, then, for a thing certain, that whatever you ask of the Lord in faith and with perseverance, you will obtain. You have no need to be abashed, for neither this blind man, nor the Canaanite, nor Zacchæus, were backward in asking favours; and they obtained them. Thus need not we be ashamed to serve God, and to put aside our sins, and to implore for ourselves necessary graces. Consciousness of shame, and bashfulness, are sometimes the accompaniments of great virtue, and sometimes of great vice. On this point, St. Bernard says, "There is a shame which bringeth sin, and there is a shame which bringeth joy. A good shame is that by which you are confounded at the recollection, or at least at the prospect, of sinning. And though perchance no human witness be present, yet will you revere the Divine Presence with shamefacedness in proportion as you consider how far purer is God than man, and that the more incapable He is of sin in Himself, the more grievously is He displeased by it in the sinner. A shame like this does undoubtedly silence reproach and tend to glory; in that it admits not sin at all, or, at any rate, chastises it when admitted by means of penitential exercises, and banishes it from the breast by confession, since our glory is this, the testimony of our conscience.* On the other hand, where any is ashamed to confess, and from this cause suffers compunction, such a shame is the attendant of sin, and forfeits the rejoicing of the conscience; inasmuch as a foolish shame ties the lips, and by no means suffers the mischief to escape, which compunction is striving to throw off from the depths of the heart." The same author says; "O bashfulness void of sense, the enemy of salvation, a stranger to all honour

* *Vid.* 2 Cor. i. 12.

and nobleness!"* And awhile after; "Is it any matter of shame for a man to be overcome of God; is it counted a reproach to be humbled under the mighty hand of God Most High?" And afterwards; "Truly, it is the highest kind of victory to yield to the Majesty of God, and the most excellent praise and glory not to revel against the authority of our Mother, the Church. O height of perverseness! to soil our feet by sin we are not ashamed, yet ashamed to bathe them with the waters of penance. *There is a shame,* according to the Wise man, *which is glory,*† when a man is ashamed either to sin, or of having sinned; nor will he thus be without even a sure glory, since shame restores what sin had put to flight."‡ Again, he says; "I know not if any thing can be noticed in human character more pleasing than shame," which," he adds, "is doubtless the ornament of every age, and yet, in the tenderest, the beauty of this sensitive grace is peculiarly conspicuous," &c.|| Thus far St. Bernard. What falls under this head of consideration, with respect to the blind man, you may likewise apply to the case of the two other blind men, who received their sight from our Lord as he went out of Jericho. For he, of whom we are now speaking, received sight before our Lord's entrance into the city. The account of the others is found in St. Matthew and St. Mark,§ where the name of one of them is recorded. The way in which they cried out, and were answered, and received their sight, was the same as in the case before us.

* Ad Milit. Templi, c. 12.
† Ecclus. iv. 21.
‡ Ep. 185, ad Eustach.
|| Serm. 86, in Cantic.
§ Matt. xx. 30, &c. Mark, x. 46.

CHAPTER XLVI.

OUR LORD ENTERS THE HOUSE OF ZACCHÆUS.*

When our Lord Jesus had entered the city of Jericho, and was passing through it, Zacchæus, a chief among the Publicans, heard of this, and was extremely desirous of seeing Him. Yet, being little of stature, he could not for the press; and so climbed up into a sycamore-tree, that so he might catch a sight of Him. Then Jesus knowing him, and accepting his faith and willingness of mind, said to him, *Zacchæus, make haste and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house.* Whereupon he came down, and received Him with great joy and reverence, and made Him a great feast. You observe the courteousness of our Lord Jesus. He granted more to Zacchæus than the latter had desired. He granted him Himself, a favour which he had not presumed to ask. Here you see the virtue of prayer. For to desire, is in itself a powerful voice, and a great prayer. The Prophet accordingly says, *The Lord hath heard the desire of the poor, Thine ear hath heard the preparation of their heart.*† Again, the Lord said to Moses, *Wherefore criest thou unto Me?* ‡ when he was keeping silence with his lips, but speaking in his heart. Behold Him then seated and taking food with the sinners. He placed Himself in the midst of the table with Zacchæus, and put some one of the party, as a mark of

* Luke, xix. 1, &c. † *Vid.* Ps. x. 17.
‡ Ex. xiv. 15.

honour, at the head; then He conversed familiarly and affably among them, as desiring to win them to Himself. Behold His disciples, also, how readily they associate with these sinners, and discourse with them, and strengthen their hearts for all good works. For they knew this to be the will of their Master, and they longed earnestly for the salvation of these men.

CHAPTER XLVII.

OUR LORD RESTORES SIGHT TO THE MAN BLIND FROM HIS BIRTH.*

When our Lord Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, He saw a man blind from his birth, whose name is said to have been Cælidonius. Our humble Lord, stooping down, made clay of spittle, and anointed his eyes, sending him to the pool of Siloam to wash. The miracle was solemnly investigated by those evil-minded men, and the inquiry issued in their confusion. Look to the history of the Gospel, which is sufficiently plain and very beautiful. In the forementioned particulars, meditate on our Lord according to the usual rules given you; and consider how lively must have been the gratitude of this blind man, when he took the part of our Lord Jesus so manfully and resolutely, even before the chief men among the Jews, and in no single word spared them, though as yet he had not seen our Lord Jesus to know Him. Highly commendable and acceptable to God is

* John, ix. 1, &c.

this virtue of gratitude, and proportionately hateful the vice of ingratitude. On which subject St. Bernard has the following; "Learn to be grateful for single gifts. Consider diligently what is afforded you; that no gifts of God may be passed over without their suitable return of gratitude; not the greater, nor the less great, nor the little. Lastly, we are bidden to gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost; or, in other words, not to forget even the least favours. Is not that as good as lost which is given to an ungrateful receiver? Ingratitude is the enemy of the soul, the squandering of merits, the scattering of virtues, the ruin of all good things. Ingratitude is a burning wind, which dries up the fountain of piety, the dew of pity, the streams of grace." * Thus far St. Bernard.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

HOW OUR LORD FLED FROM THE TEMPLE, AND HID HIMSELF WHEN THE JEWS WOULD HAVE STONED HIM.

BEHOLD! now begin the mysteries of our Lord's Passion. I shall, therefore, from this point seldom quote any passages, that I may be the better able to dwell on the Passion, and the circumstances which preceded it. When our Lord Jesus, then, was one time preaching in the temple, and said, amongst other things, *If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death;* † the Jews answered Him, *Art Thou greater than our father Abra-*

* Serm. 51, in Cantic. † John, viii. 51.

ham, which is dead? To which our Lord Jesus replied; *Before Abraham was, I AM.* Taking occasion at this, as impossible or false, they took up stones to stone Him. But He hid Himself, and went out of the Temple; for the hour of His passion was not yet come. Contemplate Him, then, well, and with deep sorrow. See how the Lord of all is contemptuously treated by those most wicked slaves, and how meekly He gives way to their fury, and hides Himself in some part of the Temple, behind a pillar, or amongst the crowd. Look at Him and His disciples withdrawing sorrowfully, and with downcast heads, like persons the most weak and helpless.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE JEWS ON ANOTHER OCCASION WISH TO STONE JESUS.

ANOTHER time, at the feast of the Dedication of the Temple, when our Lord Jesus was in Solomon's porch, those ravenous wolves surrounded Him with the greatest fury, gnashing with their teeth, and saying, *How long dost Thou make us to doubt? If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.** But the most meek Lamb humbly answered them, saying; *I told you, and ye believed not. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me.* Behold Him now well, and the whole scene, as in God's sight. He speaks to them with humility; while they, madly barking like dogs, clamoured against Him, and surrounded Him on all sides.

* John, x. 22, &c.

At length they could no longer conceal the venom of their hearts. Accordingly they took up stones to cast at Him. Yet our Lord Jesus continued to address them in sweet words of kindness, saying; *Many good works have I showed you; for which of those works do you stone Me?* They answered, among other things, *Because that Thou, being a man, makest Thyself God.* Behold their wonderful madness. They wished to know that He was Christ, and, because He proves this to them both by words and actions, they wish to stone Him. Nor can they be in any way excused for not believing Jesus to be the Son of God, as they might and ought to have done. Since, however, His hour was not yet come, He escaped out of their hands and withdrew over Jordan, to the place where John had baptized, distant from Jerusalem about eighteen leagues; and there He remained with His disciples. Consider Him, then, and His disciples, in this sorrowful departure, and compassionate both Him and them with all your power.

CHAPTER L.

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS.*

THE miracle before us is very illustrious, and very suitable for a solemn meditation. Render yourself, then, as attentive as if you were present at the words and actions relating to it; and hold willing converse not merely with our Lord Jesus and His disciples, but with

* John, xi. 1, &c.

that blessed family so devoted to our Lord, and so dear to Him; Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Lazarus then being sick, his aforementioned sisters, who were most familiar friends of our Lord, sent to Him to the place whither He had retired, that is, beyond Jordan, as you will find in the preceding chapter, saying; "Our brother Lazarus, whom Thou lovest, is sick." More than this they said not, either because this sufficed for One who was His friend, and understanding all; or, because they were fearful of asking Him to come to them, when they knew that the elders of the Jews were plotting against Him, and seeking to compass His death. Our Lord Jesus, having received the message, kept silent for two days; at the end of which He said to His disciples among other things, *Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there.* Behold the wondrous kindness and love of our Lord, and all His solicitude about his disciples. They were still in want of greater strength and virtue; wherefore He was ever ready to act with a view to their advancement. Then our Lord returned with them, and came near Bethany. Now, Martha, when she heard that He was coming, went out to meet Him; and, falling at his feet, said, *Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.* Our Lord replied, that he should rise again; and they discoursed mutually upon the resurrection. Our Lord then sends her for Mary, whom He loved with singular affection. Mary, on learning His wishes, arose with haste, and went to Him; and, throwing herself at His feet, said the like words with Martha. Our Lord Jesus, on seeing the affliction and tears of His beloved handmaiden, Himself refrained not from tears. And thus Jesus wept. Consider him well, and the sisters, and His disciples. Did not they, suppose you, weep also? All then weeping, our Lord said, after

a very brief pause, *Where have ye laid Him?* This our Lord knew; but He spoke after the manner of men. Then they said, *Lord, come and see.* And they brought Him to the grave. Our Lord Jesus then walks between the two sisters, comforting and strengthening them. And they were in truth so comforted by His presence that they forgot all their grief and all else, and fixed their minds wholly on Him. And while the three were conversing together as they went along, Magdalene said, "Lord, how has it been with Thee, since thou departedst from among us; full of grief have I been about Thy departure; and now, since I heard that Thou wert returning, I have been quite overjoyed. And yet I am still full of fears. For Thou knowest how our elders are plotting against Thee; therefore was it that we did not dare send for Thee to come to us. I rejoice that Thou art come; but I beseech Thee, for the love of God, to beware of their devices." Our Lord answered, "Fear not; My Father will provide for these things." And so, conversing together, they came to the grave. Then our Lord Jesus commanded the stone, which was laid upon it, to be lifted up. But Martha hesitated, saying, *Lord, he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days.* O gracious God, how wondrous is the love which those sisters bear to our Lord Jesus! They would have nothing reach His senses that could offend them; yet none the less, or rather all the more, our Lord caused the stone to be raised. Which done, our Lord Jesus then lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, *Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always; but because of these people which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me.* Behold Him attentively as He thus prays, and consider His zeal for the salvation of souls. *Then He cried with a loud*

voice, and said, Lazarus come forth; and he immediately came to life, and started forth, bound as he had been buried. Then the disciples, by command of their Lord, loose him; when loosed, he and the aforementioned sisters fell on their knees, and gave thanks to our Lord Jesus for this great mercy, and so they led him home. The bystanders were overcome with amazement as they witnessed these things, and the miracle was noised abroad, so that a great multitude came from Jerusalem and other parts to see Lazarus. Meanwhile the rulers of the Jews, accounting themselves baffled, took counsel about putting Him to death.

CHAPTER LI.

THE CURSING OF THE BARREN FIG-TREE.*

Although the cursing of the fig-tree, and the presentation of the woman taken in adultery in the Temple, are believed, as matters of historical fact, to have happened after our Lord's entry into Jerusalem upon the ass, yet, as it seems more proper to meditate on nothing after that event but His Supper, and Passion, and the attendant circumstances, I have thought it best to bring these two subjects before you in this place. When, then, our Lord Jesus, being on His way to Jerusalem, was an hungred, He saw a fig-tree covered with beautiful leaves, and, going near it, and finding no figs upon it, He cursed it; and immediately it withered away, so that His disciples

* Matt. xxi. 18, &c.; Mark, xi. 20, &c.

marvelled. Behold Him then, and His disciples, in these circumstances, according to the general rules I have given you. Consider, especially, that this action of our Lord had a mysterious significancy; since He knew that the time of figs was not yet come. Such a tree with its abundant leaves, we may understand to represent men of many words and no deeds; and, again, hypocrites and pretenders who, with fair outsides, are empty within and bear no fruit.

CHAPTER LII.

THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY IN THE TEMPLE.*

The miserable rulers and Pharisees were ever wakeful in their malice against our Lord Jesus, and took anxious measures to overreach Him by fraud and subtilty, and to render Him odious in the eyes of the people, but their arrows were hurled back against themselves. A certain woman, then, having been taken in adultery, who ought by the Law to have been stoned, they brought her to Him in the Temple, and asked what was to be done with her. They desired in this way to bring Him into difficulty. For, had He commanded that the law should take effect, He would have laid Himself open to the charge of cruelty and mercilessness; and on the other hand, had He proposed to violate it, they would have accused Him of injustice. But the Lord of Wisdom saw into their arts, and, being determined to avoid them, humbly stooped down and wrote with His finger upon the ground. And, as the old

* John, viii. 1, &c.

commentary says, He noted down their sins. Of such power was that writing that each of them knew it to contain his own sins. Then our Lord, raising Himself up, said, *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.* And then a second time, our kind and courteous Lord stooped down, considerate even towards those who envied and hated Him, lest they should be overwhelmed with shame. They then withdrew all, and so their craftiness came to nought. Our Lord Jesus then admonished the woman to sin no more, and let her go. Consider Him well in all the forementioned acts and words.

CHAPTER LIII.

ON THE PASSION OF OUR LORD IN GENERAL.

It comes now in order to treat on the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. He, therefore, who is anxious to "glory in the Cross" of our Lord, should dwell with an intense devotion of soul on that Passion whose mysteries and attendant circumstances, were they regarded with the rapt gaze of the understanding, would, as I think, transform him who should so meditate into a new man. For while he searched into its depths from his innermost soul, and with the whole energy of his affections, many unexpected passages would be brought before him, from which he would experience new sympathy, new love, new consolation, and, as resulting from these, a new state of spiritual existence, all which would appear to him the very presage and present enjoyment of the life of

glory. But, in order to arrive at this, consider the object of your meditations, as being yourself ignorant and a child, so that the whole attention of your mind be fixed upon it, the eyes of your heart actively awake in regarding it, and all irrelevant thoughts banished; and each person placing himself as it were in the midst of every circumstance attendant on the Cross, Passion, and Crucifixion of our Lord, with earnestness, zeal, love, and fixed intentness. I exhort you, therefore, if you have carefully realized what has been said up to this point concerning His Life, that to this you apply, even more anxiously, your whole thought and energy; for in this most of all appeareth that love of His which should inflame our whole hearts with gratitude. But receive all that I say with the same reserves as before, and as meaning no more than this, that the scenes of which we treat *may* be meditated upon in the form in which I shall relate them. For in this treatise I desire not to affirm any thing which is not affirmed or declared by means of Sacred Scripture, or the words of the Saints, or approved opinions.

We may not inaptly say, as appears to me, that not only this crucifixion of our Lord, inflicted as a punishment and ending in His death, but all the circumstances which immediately went before it, call for our most intense sympathy, bitter sorrow, and amazed awe. For what a thought is this, that our Lord Himself, "who is over all things God blessed for ever," from that hour in the night when He was taken, up to the very sixth hour of the crucifixion, was exposed to unceasing conflict, grievous pains, revilings, mockings, and sufferings! Not even a little intermission is granted to Him; and in what conflict and tumult He was placed, hear and see. Observe the very tender, and meek, and loving Jesus; one man seizes, another binds Him, another springs upon Him.

and another cries out against Him; one assaults, another blasphemes, another harasses, and another spits upon Him; one grasps Him round the body, another questions Him, another searches for false witnesses against Him, and another joins those who are searching; one utters false witness against Him, another accuses, another mocks, and another blindfolds Him; one smites His most lovely Face, another buffets Him, another leads Him to the pillar, and another strips Him; one, while He is led, strikes Him, another cries out boisterously against Him, another contemptuously reviles Him, and another binds Him to the pillar; one seizes Him with hasty violence, and another scourges Him; one clothes Him with purple in contempt, and another crowns Him with thorns; one places a reed in His hand, another madly takes it to smite His thorn-encircled head withal, another slightly bows the knee, and another mocks at him who does so. And more than these are the insults they offered Him. He is hurried forward and back, He is spit upon and rejected, carried and tossed about hither and thither as though a fool and madman, nay, as though a robber and most impious malefactor; first to Annas, then to Caiaphas, then to Pilate, presently to Herod, and again to Pilate; while there, one while He is led within, then out again, and dragged along. O, my God, what is all this? doth not this appear to Thee a most severe, bitter, unceasing, and violent conflict? But wait awhile and you shall see more miserable things yet. The chief men and Pharisees, the elders, and thousands of the people, rise up against Him with steady perseverance. All with one mind cry out that He be crucified. On His shoulders, already bruised and lacerated, is placed the cross whereon He is to suffer; from all directions not only natives of the city, but sojourners also, not only the grave and elderly,

but the wine-bibbers and profane, flock together, not to sympathize, but to scoff with the coarsest derision. There is none to acknowledge Him; all vie with each other in defiling and bruising Him with dirt and filth; and, while He bears his own shame, He is made to them a by-word. *They that sit in the gate speak against Him, and the drunkards make songs upon him.** He is tossed to and fro and troubled, He is dragged and hurried along, and thus scourged, wearied, suffering in every part of His body, and filled to the very brim with revilings, He is not allowed to rest or be at ease; scarcely can He support His spirit until He has come to the place of Calvary, a place most unclean and abominable. All has been done with vehemence and fury. But in that place an end and rest is at last given to the conflict of which we treat; yet is that rest sharper than conflict, being crucifixion and the bed of agony. See what a rest is this! You observe, therefore, how, even to the sixth hour, He endured a long and grievous conflict. Truly *the waters came in even unto His soul*, truly *many dogs came about Him*, mighty, terrible and fierce, *and the council of the wicked laid siege against Him*, who *whet their tongue like a sword and shot out their arrows, even bitter words.*† We have thus dispatched in brief what may be said concerning our Lord's Passion on the three first hours, as far as sext, namely, matins, prime, and tierce. Yet not thus, not thus summarily, must the so great bitterness and pangs of our Lord Jesus be handled; wherefore turn back again your eyes and fix your attention. For there remains great and manifold matter for contemplation, which will also reach deeply into the heart and powerfully influence the affections, provided only, as we have said, that you make yourself

* Ps. lxix. 12. † Ps. xxii. lxiv. lxix.

to be as if present at the scene; for hitherto we have spoken rather in generals, but let us carefully regard each particular, for it becomes us not to be weary in thinking upon those pains, one by one, which our Lord Himself wearied not in enduring one by one.

CHAPTER LIV.

ON THE CONSPIRACY OF THE JEWS AGAINST JESUS, AND ON HIS FLIGHT TO THE CITY EPHRAIM.*

When the time drew near wherein our Lord Jesus had determined to work out our salvation by the shedding of His own Blood, the devil armed his servants and inflamed their hearts against our Lord, so that they determined even to slay Him. His good works, especially the recalling Lazarus to life, kindled in them ever increasing fury, offering, as they did, ever increasing occasion for hopeless envy. Unable then to banish their rage, the chief priests and Pharisees assembled a council, in which, led by the prophecy of Caiaphas, they resolved upon the death of the Most Innocent Lamb. O shameful assembly! O base guides of the people and execrable counsellors! Wretches, what is it ye do? what so great madness goads you on? what dispensation is this, what cause of the murder of the Lord your God? Is He not even now in the midst of you, though ye know it not? doth He not understand all your words, and search out your reins and heart? Yet so it must needs come to pass as ye have desired;

* John, xi. 53, &c.

His Father hath delivered Him into your hands; by your hands He shall be slain, yet not for you. He truly shall die and rise again to save His people, but ye shall perish for ever. That council then was noised abroad; but the Lord of Wisdom, willing to give free scope to their wrath, and also because all things were not as yet fulfilled, went away into the country near the desert, into a city called Ephraim, and thus our lowly Lord flees before the face of His abandoned servants. Do you then behold these wicked men foaming with rage in their detestable council; behold too our Lord Jesus, and likewise His disciples, fleeing before them as helpless and poor. What think you that Magdalene said? Nay, what thoughts possessed the Mother of our Lord Jesus, when she saw Him thus depart, and heard the cause, even that they wished to slay Him? It is profitable in this place to contemplate our Lady and her sisters as having remained with Magdalene, and our Lord Jesus as having comforted them by the promise of His speedy return.

CHAPTER LV.

OUR LORD JESUS RETURNS TO BETHANY, WHERE ST. MARY MAGDALENE ANOINTS HIS FEET.*

As on the former occasion our Lord Jesus, for our instruction, showed forth His *prudence* in fleeing, teaching that, according to place and time, we ought also to avoid with caution the fury of our persecutors; so now He shows

* Matt. xxvi. 6, &c. Mark, xiv. 3, &c. John, xii. 1, &c.

forth His *fortitude*, because, when the appointed time draws near, He returns of His own accord to offer Himself to suffering, and to deliver Himself up into the hands of those who seek for Him. So formerly He showed forth *temperance*, when He fled from high station what time the crowds wished to make Him a king; and *justice* when He willed to receive honour *as* a king, what time the people went forth to meet Him with branches of palms; yet was it with moderation that He willed that honour, and for that cause mounted an ass, as St. Bernard says in this place.* Those four virtues, then, prudence, fortitude, temperance, justice, were shown forth by the Lord of virtues for our admonition; and they are called *cardinal* and *principal*, because all other moral virtues flow from them. He is not, then, to be accounted at variance with Himself, more than any one of us, who according to diversity of occasions exercises himself in divers virtues. Our Lord Jesus, then, on the Sabbath before Palm Sunday, returns to Bethany, which is distant from Jerusalem about two miles; and there they made Him a supper in the house of Simon the leper; there were present also Lazarus, Martha, and Mary (who were perhaps kinsfolk or very near friends of the same Simon). Then Mary poured over His head a pound of ointment of spikenard, and with it anointed His head and feet; and what formerly she had done in the same house to vent her contrition,† now she did to show forth her devotion: for she loved Him above all things, and could never be satisfied with doing Him service. But the traitor Judas murmured at this; and our Lord answered him in her defence, as was meet; yet not the less did he remain inflamed with anger, so that from thence he took occasion to

* Serm. 2, in Dom. Palm. † Luke, vii. 37.

betray Him, and on the following Wednesday sold our Lord Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Behold Him then at supper with His friends, and communing with them for those few days even until His passion; or rather behold Him in the house of Lazarus, for the house of him and his sister was His ordinary retreat. There He took His food by day, and slept with His disciples by night. There, as we may conceive, our Lady, His Mother, with her sisters, rested, and all paid to her great honour; Magdalene above all, by ever joining herself to her, and never quitting her. Contemplate, then, our Lady herself, who abides shaken by fear for her most beloved Son, and never withdraws herself from His presence. And when our Lord, in defending Magdalene from the murmurings of the traitor, said, *In that she hath poured this ointment on My body, she did it for My burial,* think you not that the sound of this word passed through her soul also? for what more openly *could* He say concerning His death? Likewise all remained shaken with fear and full of anxious thoughts, speaking one with another, here and there, after the manner of those who consider bitter and painful subjects. Chiefly they feared whenever He went into Jerusalem, which He did each day; for there were many things which He spoke to the Jews from that same Sabbath even to the day of His Supper, and many works which He wrought in Jerusalem. Of these I shall make no mention, except of His entrance mounted on an ass, lest the thought of Himself should be less fully in your mind; for we are at the very vestibule of His Passion. Be careful, then, collect again your whole mind, that you be not carried off to other thoughts; that you may earnestly meditate as well on these mysteries which go before it, as on the Passion itself, with a mind free from distraction and very wakeful; and at

intervals commune gladly at Bethany with the company of whom I have just spoken.

CHAPTER LVI.

ON OUR LORD'S ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM ON AN ASS; AND HOW JESUS IS RELATED TO HAVE WEPT ON THREE OCCASIONS.*

THE ancient mysteries received their full virtue, the ancient Scriptures their accomplishment, through our Lord Jesus; and now, when the time drew near, He burned to restore the world by the suffering of his own Body. Very early, then, in the morning of the next day, which was the Lord's day, He made ready to go to Jerusalem, in a manner new and unwonted, but as it had been prophesied of Him.

Now, when he came to Bethphage, which was a small village that lay in their road, He sent two of His disciples into Jerusalem to bring Him a she-ass and her foal, which were bound in a public place, provided for the use of the poor. Then our Lord Jesus sat first on the ass, and soon afterwards sat meekly on the foal; and the disciples placed their garments upon them. And thus rode on the Lord of the World; and though it were most meet that He should receive honour, yet at the very time of receiving it, such were His attendants, and such His royal adornments. Behold Him, then, well, and see how in this His honour He has put to shame the world's vain show

* Matt. xxi. 1, &c. Mark, xi. &c. Luke, xix. 28, &c. John, xii. 12, &c.

of honour. For these animals were not arrayed with golden bridles and harness, and with silken trappings, after the manner of worldly vain-glory, but with poor rags and with two small cords; though He were King of kings and Lord of lords. And the multitude, when they knew of His approach, went forth to meet Him, and received Him as a king with praises and songs, with the strewing of their garments and branches of trees, and with great acclamation. But He intermingled weeping with that acclamation; for when He saw Jerusalem He wept over it, saying; *For if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace,* thou also wouldest have wept.

And you should know that on three occasions we read that our Lord Jesus wept. Once at the death of Lazarus, when He wept for man's misery; once here, when He wept for man's blindness and ignorance (because they knew not the time of their visitation); and thirdly, at His passion, when He wept for man's sin and perverseness; because He saw that His passion sufficed for all, but profited not all, in that it profits not the reprobate, and hard of heart, and impenitent. And of this the Apostle to the Hebrews speaks, saying, concerning the time of His passion; *who with strong crying and tears was heard in that He feared;** which text refers to these three occasions. Yet the Church holds that at other times He wept also, namely as an Infant; for which cause she sings, *Vagit Infans inter arcta Conditus præsepia;*† which He did that He might conceal from the devil the mystery of the Incarnation. Behold Him, then, now weeping, and you too should weep with Him; for He weeps

* Heb. v. 7.

† The Infant weeps with piteous cries,
As, straiten'd in the crib, He lies.

copiously and intensely, because not in pretence, but in truth, He grieved with them; for which reason He bitterly wept their eternal danger. At this time, too, He foretold their destruction in this world. Behold, too, His disciples, who zealously press near Him with fear and reverence; these are His barons and counts, these His chamberlains and guards. Behold, too, His Mother, with Magdalene and the other women, following Him eagerly; nor can you think that when He wept, His Mother and the rest were able to contain their tears. Our Lord Jesus, then, in this triumphal procession, and with these greetings from the crowd, entered the city; wherewith the whole city was troubled. Then He came into the Temple, and cast out those who bought and sold there; which was their second expulsion. And our Lord Jesus remained publicly in the Temple, preaching to the people, and giving answers to the chief priests and Pharisees till late in the evening; and though so great honour had been paid Him by them, yet was no one found to ask Him even to quench His thirst in his house. That whole day, then, He and they fasted, and late in the evening He returned with them to Bethany. Behold Him, then, now again, in very lowly guise, walking through the city with so few companions, Him who had entered it with such pomp in the morning; from which you may consider that little regard is due to the world's praise, which is soon brought to an end. You may consider, too, how greatly Magdalene and the rest rejoice when He was greeted by the multitude, and much more when they returned to Bethany unharmed.

CHAPTER LVII.

ON OUR LORD'S SUPPER. EXAMPLE OF THE FIVE VIRTUES OF CHRIST AT THE SUPPER. FIVE POINTS ALSO IN OUR LORD'S DISCOURSE.*

THE time now approaching, and being very nigh at hand, of the mercies and loving-kindnesses of our Lord Jesus, wherein He had determined to save His people, and redeem them, not with corruptible gold and silver, but with His own most precious Blood, He willed to celebrate a memorable Supper with His disciples, before He should depart from them by His death, for a token of remembrance, and also that He might fulfil those mysteries which yet remained to be accomplished. Illustrious in truth was this Supper, and illustrious those things which our Lord Jesus did in it; to behold which, render yourself as though present with the greatest intentness; for if you shall have done this meekly and anxiously, the Lord of the company will not suffer you to return empty. On this subject, then, four things occur principally to be pondered, 1, the actual Supper; 2, the washing of the disciples' feet by our Lord Jesus; 3, the institution of the Sacrament of His most Sacred Body; and 4, the delivery of a most beautiful discourse by Him; on all of which let us dwell in order. 1. As regards the first, observe that Peter and John went by command of our Lord Jesus to a certain friend of theirs

* Matt. xxvi. 17, &c. Mark, xiv. 12, &c. Luke, xxii. 7, &c. John, xiii. 1, &c. 1 Cor. xi. 23, &c.

on Mount Sion, where was a large upper room prepared for the Passover; and our Lord with the other disciples, as evening drew near on the Thursday, entered the city and went to the place. Behold Him, then, tarrying in some other part of the house, and holding profitable converse with His disciples; while in the meantime some of the seventy, too, made ready for Him the Passover in the upper room. And when all things were now ready in the supper-room, the most beloved John, who was most busily going forwards and back to assist in the preparation before-mentioned, came to our Lord Jesus, saying; "Lord, Thou mayest sup when it is Thy pleasure, for all things are now ready." Behold, then, at this time carefully and with prolonged observation, all the things which are said and done; for they are very affecting, and, like the other actions of our Lord Jesus, not to be passed slightly over, but rather drawn out and amplified; in this is the great profit of all meditations concerning Him, and above all of this instance of His love, on account of the exceeding wonders which were wrought at this Supper. Our Lord Jesus then rises, and His disciples with Him; and John, pressing close to His side, from that time left Him not at all, for none so lovingly and faithfully clave to Him as John; he it was who, when He was taken, followed Him to the hall of the high-priest; nor in His crucifixion, nor in His death, nor after His death, did he leave Him, until He had been buried; and in this Supper he sat next to Him, though being younger than the rest. All then enter the upper room; they wash their hands, and, surrounding the table, most devoutly give thanks. Behold them well in each particular. A blessing then having been given by the hand of our Lord, they sit round the table, John taking his place next to our Lord Jesus Christ; and now the Paschal lamb is brought in. But

observe that you may consider this in either of two ways; one, that they sit at table as I have said; the other, that they stand upright with staves in their hands, eating the lamb with bitter herbs, and thus obeying all that is commanded in the law; so only that you imagine them to sit down afterwards in order to eat, as may be inferred from many parts of the context; for in no other way could St. John have leaned on the Lord's breast, unless by their sitting. The Paschal lamb then being brought in roasted, the true and unspotted Lamb took it, even our Lord Jesus, who was among them as He that serveth, and divided it into portions, which He gave with a cheerful countenance to His disciples, and encouraged them to eat. And they eat indeed, but with no cheerful countenance, ever fearing lest some new attempt should be made against our Lord. And while they supped, He showed them the truth more openly; and among other things said, *With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you, before I suffer, but one of you shall betray Me.* This word entered into their hearts as the sharpest sword, and they ceased from eating, and, looking at each other, said, *Lord, is it I?* Behold them now well, and sympathize as well with our Lord Jesus as with them, for they are in great grief; while the real betrayer does not cease from eating, lest these words might seem to refer to *him.*

John then, at the urgent request of Peter, asked and said, "Lord, who is it that shall betray Thee?" And our Lord Jesus opened the truth to him, as to his especially beloved, in intimate confidence; but he, struck dumb and wounded to the heart, turned towards Him and leaned on His breast. But to Peter our Lord declared it not; for, as Augustine says, if *he* had known the traitor, he would have torn him to pieces with his teeth. But

by Peter are typified the men of active life, by John, of contemplative, as St. Augustine says in the same Homily on the Gospel for St. John's Day. From whence you have an argument that the contemplative man does not go forth from the inner life, and, even in regard to sins, does not call down God's wrath upon them, but groans inwardly and turns himself to God by means of prayer, and approaching Him more earnestly by contemplation, and abiding in Him, commits everything to His good appointment; not but that sometimes, from zeal for God and for souls, even he does issue forth from his retirement, as you have more fully laid down for you in the treatise on the contemplative life. In this place, also, you have this fact, that John told it not even to Peter, though it was at a signal from him that he asked our Lord; from which you may gather that the contemplative man ought not to make known the secret of his Lord. Thus we read of St. Francis, that he made not known to others his secret revelations, unless so far as zeal for his brethren's salvation called for it, or the voice of inspiration from above commanded it. Behold then now, the kindness of our Lord, how graciously He keeps His beloved friend on His breast; and with what exceeding tenderness did they love each other! Behold, also, the other disciples much grieving at this word of our Lord; not eating, but gazing at each other and unable to take counsel about these things. This, then, suffices on the first part.

2. But observe attentively on the second particular; for, while these things are so, our Lord Jesus rises from supper, and the disciples rise also, not knowing whither He wills to go. Then He went down with them into another room below in the same house, as they say who have seen the spot, and made them all sit down; He

commands water to be brought, He lays aside His garments, girds Himself with a towel, and pours water into a stone basin, that He might wash their feet. Peter refuses, and all-amazed shrinks from a thing in his judgment so unseemly; but, on hearing the threat of Christ, he wisely changed his intention. Contemplate now well each particular, and behold with awe all that takes place; the Highest bows Himself down, and the Master of Humility stands bending down at the feet of a fisherman, or on His knees before them while they sit down; with His own hands He washes, dries, and kisses the feet of them all, nay, and this too magnifies His humility, that He performs the same servile office for the traitor himself. But O, perverse heart, and harder than all hardness, if at the sight of so great lowliness thou art not softened, if still thou revere not the Lord of Glory, if still thou rage even for the death of Him, ever merciful to thee, ever free from sin; but woe unto thee, thou wretched man! thou shalt bring forth what thou hast conceived in thy hardened heart, yet not He, but thou shalt perish. Here, then, we must admire so great a depth of lowliness and loving-kindness. Having now fulfilled this office, He returns to the supper-room, and, reclining again, exhorts them to follow His example: and in this place you may meditate that our Lord Jesus, on that evening, gave us the example of five great virtues; viz. of humility, as has been mentioned, in washing their feet; of love, in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, and in the discourse which is filled with precepts of love; of patience, in bearing with His betrayer, and with those many revilings, when He was taken and carried away as a thief; of obedience, in going to suffering and death at the command of His Father; of prayer, in praying three times in

the garden. Let us, then, strive to imitate Him in these virtues. And so much on our revered Lord.

3. But, in meditating on the third particular, think with awe of that most loving condescension and most condescending love, whereby He gave Himself for us, and left Himself to be our nourishment. When, then, having washed the disciples' feet, He again reclined, it being now His will to put an end to the ordinances and sacrifices of the Law, and institute a New Covenant, He makes Himself the New Sacrifice, and taking bread, and raising His eyes to the Father, He made it the most Wonderful Sacrament of His Body; and giving it to His disciples, said, "THIS IS MY BODY, which is given for you;" and likewise the Cup, saying, "THIS IS MY BLOOD, which is shed for you." Behold, then, carefully before God, with what diligence, faithfulness, and devotion He does this, and how with His own hands He communicated that His beloved and blessed family; and at length, as a memorial of His love, He adds, *Do this in remembrance of me.* This is that memorial which, when the grateful soul receives it by manducation or faithful meditation, ought to inflame her wholly, and inebriate her, and transform her into the very Lord Himself, for the intenseness of her love and devotion; for nothing could He leave to us greater, dearer, sweeter, more profitable than Himself. He, whom in that Sacrament we receive, is that same who was wonderfully conceived, born of a Virgin, who for you endured death, and who rose again; who, having gloriously ascended into Heaven, sitteth on the right hand of God; He it is who created heaven and earth, and all things, who governs and directs them; He it is on whom hangeth your salvation, in whose will and power it is to give, or not to give, you

the glory of Paradise; He it is who was offered up for you, and is given to you; He, even Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. And so much on the third part.

4. But in the fourth particular, which comes as a superabundant addition to the sum of all, observe other marks of His love. For He delivers to them a most beautiful discourse, full of sweetness, and kindled by the fire of love. For having communicated His disciples, and among them, according to Augustine, Judas, the worst of men, (though according to others he was not included in the communion,) the Lord Jesus says to Judas, *That thou doest, do quickly;* and he, the wretched man, went out to the chief priests, to whom he had sold Him, the day before, for thirty pieces of silver, and asked of them a band of soldiers to take Him. In the mean time the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples the before-named discourse; from the whole extent of which, pregnant, profitable, and adorable as was the whole, I take five points to be principally contemplated. First, how that in foretelling His departure to the disciples, He comforted them. For He said, *Yet a little while I am with you,* but *I will not leave you comfortless; I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice.* These, and things like these, which I lightly pass over, went altogether through their hearts and pierced them; for they could not bear to hear of His departure. In the second place, meditate with regard to this discourse how heartily and earnestly He taught them of love, saying, with many repetitions, *These things I command you, that ye love one another; by this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another;* and other things of the same sort, which you will be able to find more at large in the text. The third meditation on the discourse may be, how carefully He exhorted them

to the observance of His commandments; saying, *If ye love Me, keep My commandments*, and *If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love*, and other like things. Fourthly, consider how He gives them courage to meet their troubles, which He foretold should come upon them; thus, *In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.* And again; *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. The world shall rejoice*, but *ye shall be sorrowful; but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.* In the fifth place, as to this discourse, consider how the Lord Jesus at length, looking up to heaven, addressed Himself to His Father, and said, *Father, keep those whom Thou hast given Me: while I was with them, in the world, I kept them, but now I come to Thee: Holy Father, I pray for them; I pray not for the world; neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word. Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory.* And other like words, which were truly piercing to the heart; strange indeed how the disciples, who so ardently loved the Lord Jesus, could endure these words. If therefore you will meditate with attention on the things which were said in this discourse, and anxiously turn them over in your mind, and rest in the perception of their sweetness, you may well burn with love at so great condescension, mercy, forethought, compassionateness, and love, and also at the other things which He did on that evening. Behold Him then while He speaks to them, how forcibly, earnestly, and affectionately He speaks, so as to impress on their minds what He says, and how He supports them by the loving tenderness of His appearance and words. Behold, too, His

disciples, how they stand with head bowed down, weeping and sending forth heavy sighs; for they are filled to the brim with sadness, of which the Truth Itself gave witness, saying, *Because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart.* And among the rest behold John, clinging to Him with affection, with what diligent attention he gazes on his Beloved, and with loving care gathers up all His words; for it is he alone who has handed them down to us accurately. And in the midst of His discourse the Lord said, *Arise, let us go hence.* O what fear then possessed them, not knowing whither or how they were to go, and dreading exceedingly the thought of being separated from Him; still He continued speaking, and finished His discourse, not in the place where He began it, but as they went along the way. Behold now the disciples proceeding after Him and with Him, approaching each as near to Him as may be, crowding together in a flock even as chickens follow their mother; touching Him, first one and then the other, from their anxious wish to be near Him, and to hear His words, while He willingly bore this at their hands. At length, having ended His deep sayings, He goes with them into a garden, over the brook Cedron, and there waited for His betrayer and the armed multitude.

CHAPTER LVIII.

MEDITATION ON OUR LORD'S PASSION BEFORE DAY-BREAK.*

Do you then observe each particular, as though you were present, and behold Him attentively, when, having finished His discourse, He goes into the garden with His disciples. At length, enter with Him, and consider how lovingly, kindly, and unreservedly He speaks with them, and exhorts them to prayer; how also He departs from them a little, that is, a stone's cast, and, kneeling down, meekly and reverently prays to the Father. At this point rest a little while, and meditate with a devout mind on the marvels of the Lord your God.

Our Lord Jesus now prays: many times before this we read that He prayed, but then for us, as being our Advocate, now He prays for Himself. Compassionate Him, and dwell with wonder on His most deep lowliness; for though He be God, co-equal and co-eternal with His Father, He seems to forget that He is God, and prays as Man; He abides, like one of the meanest of the people, praying to the Lord. Consider too His most perfect obedience; for what does He pray? He prays the Father that the hour of death may pass from Him; that is, that, if it be God's pleasure, He may not die; and in this prayer He is not heard, according, that is, to a certain lower will within Him; for, as I shall say, there was

* These Meditations (which are appointed especially for *Friday*) are arranged according to the different Canonical Hours; viz. Matins and Lauds, before day-break; Prime, at sun-rise; Tierce, 9 o'clock; Sext, 12; None, 3; Vespers, 6; Compline, before bed-time.

within Him more than one will. And in this too do you compassionate Him, that it is altogether His Father's will that He die; He spared Him not, though His True and Only Son, but thus delivered Him up for us all; for He so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son. But our Lord Jesus takes on Himself obedience to this command, and reverentially performs it. See, in the third place, the unspeakable love towards us both of Father and of Son, most worthy of sympathy, of admiration, of reverence; for us this death is enjoined, for us endured, through Their exceeding love of man. Our Lord Jesus then prays to the Father in many words, saying, "O My most merciful Father, I pray Thee hear My prayer, and hide not Thyself from My petition; take heed unto Me, and hear Me how I mourn in My prayer, and am vexed; My heart is disquieted within Me;* bow down Thine ear to Me, make haste to deliver Me.† It hath been Thy pleasure, O Father, to send Me into the world, that I might make atonement for the injury done to Thee by man; and when Thou didst will, then said I, Lo! I come. In the volume of the book it is written of Me, that I should fulfil Thy will, O My God; I am content to do it; My talk hath been of Thy truth, and of Thy salvation.‡ I have been in poverty and much labour, from my youth up,§ fulfilling Thy will, and all Thy commandments; and ready am I to fulfil even what remains. Yet, if it may be, O My Father, save Me from so great bitterness as is prepared against Me by My enemies; for behold, O Father, the blasphemy of the multitude; how they conspire together against Me, and take

* Ps. lv. 1, 2, 4. † Ps. xxxi. 2. ‡ Ps. xl. 9, 10, 12.
§ Ps. lxxxviii. 15. Pauper sum ego et in laboribus à juventute meâ. Vulg.

their counsel to take away My life.* But, O Holy Father, if I have done any such thing, or if there be any wickedness in My hands; if I have rewarded evil unto him that dealt [evil] with Me, then let Mine enemy persecute My soul, and take Me.† I have ever done those things which are pleasing in Thy sight; but they have rewarded Me evil for good, and hatred for My good-will.‡ They have corrupted My disciple, and taken him for their guide, that they might destroy Me; they have fixed My price at thirty pieces of silver, at which price they have valued Me. I pray Thee, O My Father, that this cup may pass from Me; but, if it seem not so to Thee, not My will, but Thine, be done. O Father, stand up to help Me, make speed to save Me; for though they knew Me not, O Father most Beloved, to be Thy Son, yet for that I lived among them a blameless life and wrought for them many mercies, not justly are they so bitter against Me. Remember that I stood before Thee to speak good for them, and to turn away Thy wrath from them: shall evil be recompensed for good? for they have digged a pit for My soul,§ and prepared for Me a most shameful death. Thou seest, O God; keep not still silence; O go not from Me, for trouble is hard at hand, and there is none to help Me.‖ Thou hast known My reproof, My shame, and My dishonour; My adversaries are all in Thy sight; Thy rebuke hath broken My heart; I am full of heaviness."¶

And our Lord Jesus returns from praying to His disciples, and strengthens them. And again a second and a third time He returned to prayer; for He prayed in three different places, distant from each other about a stone's

* Ps. xxxi. 15. † Ps. vii. 3, 4, 5. ‡ Ps. cix. 4.
§ Jer. xviii. 20. ‖ Ps. xxii. 11. ¶ Ps. lxix. 20, 21.

cast ; not so far as with a great effort one might throw a stone, but with a gentle impulse ; perhaps about the same length as our houses, as I hear from one of our brethren who has been there ; and still on those very spots are the remains of the churches which have been built upon them. He returned, then, to prayer, as I said, the second and the third time, and prayed the same words. Meanwhile the most sacred Blood of His Body, breaking forth like sweat, in this conflict or agony, as He prays more earnestly, flows down in streams to the ground.

Observe Him, then, at this time ; consider how great the anguish of His soul ; but consider, also, as a warning against our impatience, that our Lord prayed thrice before He received an answer from His Father. But while our Lord thus prays in agony, behold, the Angel of the Lord stood by Him, strengthening Him. And our lowly Lord receives this encouragement even from His creature with meekness and reverence, remembering that He is made lower than the angels* so long as He abides in this vale of tears ; therefore it was that *as Man* He suffered sorrow ; *as Man* He was strengthened by the words of the Angel. He rises, then, from prayer the third time, His whole person bathed in blood ; behold Him cleansing His face from it, or haply immersing it in the stream ; behold Him, and grieve with Him from your innermost heart ; for in no way could this happen but with intense bitterness of grief.

Some masters of wisdom and commentators, however, say that our Lord Jesus prayed to the Father, not so much from fear of suffering as from pity for His former people ; for that He grieved for the Jews, who should be

* Ps. viii. 5.

lost as a nation in requital of His most cruel death. For least of all ought they to have slain Him, who was of themselves, and bound by their law, and performed for them so great mercies, and prayed for their salvation to the Father, saying, "That the multitude of the Gentiles may believe, I refuse not to suffer; and if the Jews must needs be blinded, that others may receive their sight, not My will, but Thine, be done." For there was then in Christ a fourfold will; a will, which wished not to suffer; a will, which shrank back and feared; a will, which obeyed and gave its consent (for, as Isaiah says, He was offered up because it was His will*);† and the will of Divinity, which commanded and pronounced the decree. Therefore in that He was Very Man, as man He was brought into great distress; compassionate Him, then, from the bottom of your soul; contemplate and carefully observe all the actions and all the affections of the Lord your God.

Then comes He to the disciples and says, *Sleep on now, and take your rest;* for they had fallen asleep the while the Good Shepherd wakes for the guardianship of

* "Oblatus est quia Ipse voluit," Isaiah, liii. 7; Vulgate: "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted," in our version.

† "There are in Human Nature three wills;" (it must always be remembered that the word *will*, in this place, is quite distinct from that which is popularly used to express *consent;*) "viz. 1. voluntas carnis, the will which shrinks from present pain, and seeks present pleasure; 2. voluntas sensualitatis, the will which refers conduct to some unreal worldly good instead of the true; 3. voluntas rationis, the will which seeks the true good. In Adam before the Fall, the latter was wholly subjected to the will of God, and the two former wholly to *it;* but, when it rebelled, it lost its absolute power over the inferior wills." [The substance of the note in inverted commas is supplied by the friend to whom the editor is indebted for this portion of the translation. On the several wills in our Blessed Lord, as He was Man, see St. Thomas Aquinas, Sentent. lib. iii. Distinct. 17.—ED.]

His little flock. O mighty love! He loved them even to the end, when He Himself being in that bitter agony obtains rest for them. But He saw from afar His enemies coming with torches and arms, yet roused He not the disciples till they were near and close at hand; then said He, *It is enough; behold he is at hand that doth betray Me.*

And, while He yet spoke, the wretched Judas, the shameful trafficker, came before them and kissed Him. For it is said to have been the custom of our Lord Jesus, when He had sent forth any of His disciples, to receive them with a kiss on their return; therefore it was that the traitor, for a sign to them, betrayed Jesus with a kiss, and, coming before the rest with his kiss, joined Him, as though he said, "I am not connected with that armed multitude; I return only as is our habit, and kiss Thee, saying, *Hail, Master!*" Behold the scene then carefully; follow with your eyes our Lord, and observe how patiently and gently He receives the embrace of that miserable man, and the traitor's kiss, whose feet He had so lately washed, and to whom He had imparted the Heavenly Food. See how He suffers Himself to be taken prisoner, bound, smitten, hurried away in their mad fury, as though He were some evil-doer and wholly powerless to defend Himself; see how He compassionates His disciples, who flee and are dispersed here and there. You may behold too their grief; how that, sorrowful and constrained by force, they sent forth groans and sighs; how that as orphans, and overcome with terror, they gave place; how that their grief was more and more increased when they beheld their Lord so piteously dragged along; when they beheld these dogs carrying Him off to sacrifice, and Him as a most gentle lamb following them without resistance. Behold Him again, how He is dragged along by these most

wicked men through the brook up the streets of Jerusalem in tumult and unrest, His hands bound behind His back, stripped of His upper garment, His head uncovered, bowed down with weariness, and hurrying along with exceeding speed. And now at length, when He is brought before the chief priests, Annas and Caiaphas, and the other elders assembled with them, they rejoice as a lion when the prey is taken, they interrogate Him, they suborn false witnesses, they condemn Him, spit on His most sacred Face, blindfold and buffet Him, smite Him with the palms of their hands, saying, *Prophesy who is it that smote Thee?* They oppress Him with many insults, and through all He bore Himself with unruffled patience. Behold Him here in each particular, and compassionate Him. At length the chief men departed.

CHAPTER LIX.

MEDITATION ON THE PASSION OF OUR LORD FOR SUN-RISE.

But very early in the morning the chief men and rulers of the people returned, and caused His hands to be bound behind His back, saying, "Come, Thou thief, come to the proof; this day shall Thy sorceries be brought to an end; soon shall Thy wisdom be made manifest." Thus saying, they led Him to Pilate; while He followed them as though a malefactor, though He were the most innocent lamb. But when His Mother, John, and the women their companions, went forth at the first dawn of day to come to Him, and met Him in the public way, hurried along by so vast a multitude, amidst so many

reproaches and insults, it cannot be told with how great grief they were oppressed; on both sides, indeed, at that meeting was the most bitter anguish; for the Lord too was much saddened from His loving regard to the sorrows of His friends, most of all of His Mother, knowing, as He did, that for His sake they were distracted with grief, even to the rending asunder the soul from the body. Contemplate Him then, and behold Him in each particular; for they are all well fitted to call forth great, yea, exceeding compassion.

He is led then to Pilate; and those women follow afar off, because they cannot be near. Then He is accused by them of many things; and Pilate sent Him to Herod, wherein Herod rejoiced, desiring to see of His miracles; but he could obtain from Him no miracle, nor even a word; so that, esteeming Him as a madman, he caused Him in mockery to be arrayed in a white garment,* and sent Him back to Pilate. See then how, being considered by them all, not as a malefactor only, but a madman, He bore all these things with exceeding patience; behold Him as He is led forward and back, proceeding with face towards the ground and lowly steps, hearing the shouts, reproaches, derisions of all; receiving haply on His person the violent blows of stones, or the filth of other missiles. Behold, too, His Mother and disciples, standing far off, in unspeakable grief; then following Him to and fro. And when He is brought back to Pilate, those blasphemers† follow up their charges with zeal and inveterate hatred; yet found not Pilate cause of death against Him, and strove to set Him free; "I will, therefore," said he, "chastise Him, and let Him go." Chastisest thou thy Lord, O Pilate? Thou knowest not

* Veste albâ, Vulg. λαμπρᾷ, Gr. † canes. *Vid.* Ps. xxii. 16.

what thou dost; *He* deserves not death nor stripes; more rightly at His bidding wouldest thou chastise thyself. Then ordered he Him to be most severely scourged.

Our Lord then is stripped of His raiment, and bound to the pillar, and scourged in divers ways. He, then, most comely and most modest, "fairer than the children of men," stands naked before them all; that flesh most innocent and tender, most unspotted and beautiful, endures the severe and painful stripes of the basest of men; the Flower of all flesh and of all human nature is covered over with disfigurements and bruises; from all parts of His Body His Royal Blood flows forth in another stream, and again in another; wound is added to wound, bruise to bruise, until not the executioners only, but the very spectators, being wearied, He is ordered to be released. The pillar, to which He had been bound, still shows the marks of blood, as is related in some accounts. At this point, then, pause a long time, that you may carefully consider the scene; and if you do not sorrow with Him, conclude that you have a heart of stone. Then were fulfilled the words of Isaiah the prophet; When we saw Him, there was no form nor comeliness that we should desire Him; *we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.** O Lord Jesus, who was he so bold, so daring, that stripped Thee? who those, even more daring, who bound Thee? who those, most daring of all, who scourged Thee with such exceeding severity? But Thou, O Sun of Righteousness, didst withdraw Thy rays, and therefore darkness came on, and the power of darkness. All have now power over Thee; Thy love it was, and our sinfulness, which made Thee thus powerless; accursed be that so great sinfulness of ours for which Thou art so punished.

* *Vid.* Isaiah, liii. 2. 4.

Our Lord then being released from the pillar, they lead Him, stripped as He was and suffering from the scourge, searching through the house for His poor raiment, which had been scattered about in all directions by those who stripped Him. Behold Him well, thus suffering and miserably shivering; for it was cold, as says the Gospel.* But, when He would have clothed Himself, some impious mockers strive with Him, saying to Pilate, "Sir, He made Himself a King; array we Him, then, and crown Him with a king's state." Then took they a mean robe of purple silk and clothed Him withal; and they crowned Him with thorns. Behold Him, then, in all His doings and sufferings; for He does and suffers all that they will have Him. He wears the purple, He bears the crown of thorns on His head. He takes the reed in His hand, and while they bow the knee, and hail Him as king, He holds His peace and is most patiently silent. Behold Him now in the bitterness of His heart; most of all, when His head encircled with thorns is oftentimes smitten by the reed; see Him with His neck bowed down, from extremity of pain, when He receives those blows, for those most grievous thorns pierced His most sacred head, and made it all moistened with blood. O wretches! how will that awful Head hereafter be displayed in your sight, which now ye smite! for they mocked at Him as at one who would be king, but could not. But He bears all, for their cruelty was very great; nor sufficed it for them that for the greater mockery they had gathered together the whole band of soldiers. For they bring Him forth to the public gaze before Pilate and the whole people, thus mocked, and bearing His crown of thorns and purple robe. In God's name then behold Him, how He stands

* John, xviii. 18.

with face bent towards the ground, while the whole multitude shout, and cry out, "Crucify Him," mock and scoff Him, as though wiser than He. Observe, too, how He vouchsafes so to appear as if He had been weak and unwise in His doings towards the chief men and Pharisees, since they have thus enclosed Him in their toils and are bringing Him to such an end; so that He endured not pain only and vengeance, but contempt also at their hands.

CHAPTER LX.

MEDITATION ON THE PASSION OF OUR LORD FOR THE THIRD HOUR.

THE whole multitude then require that He be crucified, and thus His condemnation is pronounced by Pilate, that unhappy judge. They remember not His merciful deeds and mighty works, His innocence teaches them not; nay, which appears most cruel, they draw not back because of the sufferings which they have already brought upon Him; rather, indeed, the chief men and elders rejoice that they have compassed their evil design. They laugh, they mock Him who is the True and Eternal God, they hasten His death. He is brought back again within doors, and stripped of the purple robe; He stands naked before them, nor do they suffer Him to resume His raiment. Here give your diligent attention, and consider His condition in every particular; and that you may compassionate Him from your innermost soul, and sorrow in His sorrow, turn away your eyes for a brief space from

His Divine Nature, and think of Him as of a mere man. You will see a young man, comely, most noble in mind, most innocent, most loving, His whole person wounded by the scourge, covered with blood, discoloured, gathering up from the ground His mean garments scattered about on every side; you will see Him then clothe Himself again before them all, with a certain modesty, bashfulness, and avoidance of their gaze, while they turn towards Him countenances of contempt and derision, as though He were the meanest of all, forsaken of God, abandoned of all help. Then return to the thought of His Divine Nature; consider the unbounded, eternal, incomprehensible, Almighty Majesty, made flesh, bowing down humbly, bending to the ground, and gathering up His raiment; clothing Himself with shrinking bashfulness, even as though He were the meanest of men, yea, a slave subjected to their power, and chastised by them for some delinquency. Behold Him with care, and wonder at His lowliness; like these too may be your thoughts, when you regard Him bound to the pillar and cruelly scourged. And when He has resumed His clothes, they lead Him out, that they may no longer defer His death; and they place upon His shoulders the adorable wood of the cross, long, thick, very heavy; and the most meek Lamb receives it with patience and bears it. (There is a current opinion that the Lord's cross was fifteen feet in height.) Then He is dragged and hurried along, filled full of revilings, as was done at the first in the morning hour. He is dragged along with His two companions, even two thieves; lo, this is His company! O merciful Jesus, what shame do these Thy two friends cause Thee! They join Thee with thieves; nay, they do more to Thee than to them, for they load Thee with Thine own cross; which we read not of them; so that not only, as says Isaiah, *He was numbered with the trans-*

*gressors,** He was reckoned more a transgressor than they. Unspeakable, O Lord, is Thy patience!

At this point then behold Him well, how He moves on, bent down with the weight of His cross, and how grievously He pants for breath; sorrow with Him as much as you may, brought into so great a strait, enduring such repeated insults. And for that His Mother, truly sorrowing, for the multitude of the people could not come nigh to Him, nor see Him, she went with John and the women her companions by a shorter way, that, being before the rest, she might approach Him; but when, on meeting Him where the roads joined without the gate of the city, she beheld Him laden with that heavy cross, which she had not seen before, she became half dead with sorrow, and could not utter a word; nor yet could the Lord speak to her, for He was hurried on by those who led Him to be crucified. But, going on a little further, He turned to the weeping women, and said, *Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me,* as is more fully set forth in the Gospel. And on these two spots appear remains of churches, which existed indeed within the memory of man, as I had from one of our brethren who saw them, who tells me too that the Mount of Calvary on which Christ was crucified was about as far distant from the gate of the city, as our dwelling from St. Germanus's gate; so that the distance for His cross to be borne was very great. When, therefore, He had gone further, and was so wearied and crippled that He could bear it no more, He laid it down. But these wicked men, unwilling to delay His death, fearing lest Pilate might recal His sentence, since he showed a wish for letting Him go, compelled another to bear His cross; but Him, thus

* Is. liii. 12.

relieved, they led as some thief bound to the place called Calvary. Do not then these sufferings of His at matins, at prime, at tierce, seem to you, even without His crucifixion, to have been most violent and bitter griefs, to have been awful and dreadful scenes? Truly I think so; I think them most fitted for moving us to sorrow with Him, as being most fitted for moving Him to sorrow. Thus then we seem to have finished what was to be said on these three hours for the present; let us now see what came to pass at His crucifixion and death, i.e. at sext and none; afterwards we shall take account of those events which followed His death, namely, at vespers and compline.

CHAPTER LXI.

MEDITATION ON THE PASSION OF OUR LORD FOR THE SIXTH HOUR.

When then our Lord Jesus, led by wicked men, came to the foul and abominable place Calvary, you may behold these sinful men actively employed in all directions on their wicked business. Make yourself present at this with the whole attention of your mind, and carefully observe all that is done against our Lord, and what is said and done by Him, and by His means. See then with your mind's eye some making ready nails and hammers, others a ladder, and other instruments; others again presiding over this work, while others strip Him; for He is stripped and naked the third time before the whole multitude, and the wounds open afresh, from His garments having adhered to His flesh. In this place observe

carefully the method of crucifixion. Two ladders are placed behind, one at the right hand, the other at the left; wicked men mount these with nails and hammers, while another ladder is placed in front, reaching to the part on which the feet were to be fixed. Observe then well each particular: our Lord Jesus is compelled to ascend the cross by this small ladder (whatever they will, He does meekly, without remonstrance or contradiction); and when He had come to the cross at the top of this small ladder, He turns His face round, and expanding His Royal arms, raises them up, and offers them to those who crucify Him. He looks up to heaven, and says to His Father, "Lo, here am I, My Father. Thou hast willed that I should be brought low, even to the death of the cross, for the love and salvation of mankind; it is My pleasure —I am content to do it; I offer Myself for those whom Thou hast given Me, whom Thou hast willed to be My brethren. O Father, accept My offering; henceforward be propitious from love of Me; wipe away from them all former stains, and set them far from them. Father, I offer Myself to Thee for them." Then he who is behind the cross takes His right hand, and nails it down strongly to the cross; which done, he on the left side takes His left hand, draws it out as far as he can, puts in another nail, strikes it down and fixes it in. Then they come down from the ladders, which are all taken away, and the Lord hangs down by the weight of His Body, drawing Him downwards, supported only by nails through His hands. Nevertheless, another comes up and draws Him down by the feet as far as possible, and, while He is thus drawn down, yet another transfixes His feet with a most cruel nail.

Some there are, however, who think that this was not the method of crucifixion; but that, laying the cross along

the ground, they placed Him upon it, then raised the cross, and fixed it in the ground. If you incline to this, behold how they seize Him contemptuously, as though the meanest ruffian, and with mad fury throw Him down upon the cross, taking His arms and fixing them most cruelly upon it, having first drawn them with violence in opposite directions. In like manner behold what was done to His feet, which they drew down with the greatest possible violence.

Behold, our Lord Jesus is crucified, and so extended on the cross, that "He might tell all His bones," as He complains in the person of the Prophet; streams of blood flow forth on all sides from three grievous wounds; so confined is He that He can move no part of Himself except His head; those three nails support the whole weight of His Body; He endures the most bitter griefs, and is afflicted beyond what may be said or thought. He hangs between two thieves; on all sides sufferings, on all sides revilings and reproaches; for, though He be in so great a strait, they refrain not from reproaches; some say, blaspheming, *Ah, Thou that destroyest the Temple;* others, *Himself He cannot save;* and many other reproaches. *If He be the Son of God, let Him come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.* Nay, the very soldiers who crucified Him parted His garments in His presence.

And all these things are said and done in the presence of His most sorrowful Mother; whose sorrow for Him much increased His sorrow, and so reciprocally. She hung with her Son upon the cross, and chose rather to die with Him than live more. Suffering is on all sides; the misery might be felt, it might not be told. His Mother stood near His cross, between the crosses of the thieves; she turned not her eyes from her Son; she suffered as

He suffered, and prayed for Him with her whole heart. And there were near the cross with our Lady, John and Magdalene, and our Lady's two sisters, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, and perhaps others also; all of whom, and especially Magdalene, that beloved disciple of our Lord, wept bitterly, and could not be comforted, because of their beloved Lord and Master; they suffered with Him, with our Lady, with each other. Again and again was their grief renewed, as some new suffering in word or deed was added to their Lord.

CHAPTER LXII.

MEDITATION ON OUR LORD'S PASSION FOR THE NINTH HOUR.

But our Lord hanging on the cross was not inactive until the time of His spirit's departure; He both did and taught for our instruction, for which cause He uttered Seven Words, as we find written in the Gospel.

1. The first, in the very act of His crucifixion, when He prayed for His murderers, saying; *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* Which word gives us an instance of great patience, great love, yea, unspeakable charity.

2. The second was to His Mother, when He said; *Woman, behold thy son;* and to John, *Behold thy Mother.* He called her not Mother, lest she might grieve the more from the tenderness of her intense love.

3. The third, to the penitent thief, when He said; *This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.*

4. The fourth, *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*, that is, *My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me.* As though He said, "Father, Thou didst so love the world, that, while Thou hast delivered Me for it, Thou seemest to have forsaken Me."

5. The fifth, when He said; *I thirst.* At which word great was the sorrow of His Mother and her companions, and John; and great was the joy of those wicked men. For though it might be explained as though He thirsted for the salvation of souls; yet in truth He thirsted, for from the effusion of blood He was dried within, and parched. And when these cruel men could think of no more means whereby they might do Him injury, they adopted a new mode of troubling Him; they gave Him vinegar to drink, mingled with gall. Accursed be their fury, for it was relentless, and they inflicted on Him what injury they could.

6. The sixth word was, *It is finished;* as though He had said, "Father, I have done what Thou gavest Me to do. Still, order what Thou wilt to Me, Thy Son, I am ready to accomplish for Thee whatever may remain; for I am prepared for the rod * But what was written concerning Me is finished; if it be Thy will, O Father, call Me back to Thee; and as though the Father said to Him; "Come, My beloved Son, Thou hast done all things well, I will not that Thou sorrow further; come, for I will receive Thee in My bosom and in My arms." And from that time He began to droop, after the manner of dying persons, now opening, now closing His eyes; now turning to one side, now to the other; all His strength failing Him.

* Ego in flagella paratus sum. Vulg. Ps. xxxvii. 18. In our version, Ps. xxxviii. 17. "I truly am set in the plague."

At length, He added the seventh word, with a great cry and tears, saying to the Father; *Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit;* and saying this, and bowing His head on His breast towards the Father, as though giving Him thanks for that He called Him to Himself, He rendered His spirit into His hands. This cry it was at which the centurion was converted who was there, and said, *Truly this was the Son of God;* hearing Him cry as He expired; for other men cannot cry when they die; therefore he believed in Him. And great truly was that cry; heard even in Hell. How then, was the soul of His Mother, when she saw Him thus grievously sink, languish, weep, and die? either from the multitude of her sorrows she was as in a trance, and insensible, or she became half-dead; much more now than when she met Him bearing the cross. What, then, did Magdalene, that faithful, and beloved disciple? what John, loved above all? what the other two sisters of our Lady? What, indeed, could they do, filled with sorrow, overflowing with bitterness, stupified with misery? They all wept, and refused comfort. Behold, then, our Lord hangs dead on the cross, the whole multitude returns, the Mother remains most sorrowful with those four; they dispose themselves for sitting at the foot of the cross, they gaze on their Beloved, they wait for help from our Lord to know how they may be able to obtain Him again, and bury Him. But you, if you have well contemplated your Lord, may consider that from the sole of His foot even to His head there is no soundness in Him; no limb, no sensation of His body which hath not endured grievous affliction or suffering. You have then what it seems sufficient to set down at present on the circumstances of His crucifixion and death for sext and none; sufficient whether for my poor abi-

lity, or for your inexperience; but do you give heed to the task of dwelling on all these things with devotion, faithfulness, and anxious care. Now let us speak of what took place after His death.

CHAPTER LXIII.

ON THE OPENING OF OUR LORD'S SIDE.

While, then, Mary, and John, Magdalene, and the sisters of our Lord's Mother, were sitting on one side near the cross, and were gazing unintermittingly on our Lord Jesus hanging thus between two thieves, naked, oppressed, dead, forsaken of all, lo, many soldiers came from the city towards them, who had been sent to break the legs of those who had been crucified, put them to death, and bury them, that the bodies might not remain hanging on the cross on the Sabbath-day, which was an high day. Then our Lady, and the rest, rise and gaze on them; they know not what it can be; their grief is renewed, their fears increased. And all five, weeping, changed their place, and put themselves in front of the cross. The soldiers come up with great heat and noise, and, seeing the thieves to be still alive, break their legs and put them to death, and taking them down from the cross throw them without delay into some ditch. And then they come to our Lord Jesus; and one of them, whose name is said to have been Longinus, at that time unbelieving and proud, but afterwards converted, a Martyr, and a Saint, aiming his spear from a distance, setting at nought the prayers and tears of the blessed company,

opened the side of our Lord Jesus by a large incision, and thence flowed Blood and Water. The blessed Mother and the others dispose themselves again to the office of sitting down before the cross, not knowing what to do; for they cannot take down the Body and bury it, having neither strength nor instruments to do so; they dare not depart while He so remains; they cannot remain when night comes on. See, then, how great is their perplexity.

CHAPTER LXIV.

MEDITATION FOR VESPERS.

But, again, they see several other persons coming along the road, who were Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus, bringing with them others, with instruments for taking down the body from the cross; and they had brought with them about a hundred pounds' weight of myrrh and aloes, and they were coming to bury our Lord. Upon this, they all rise up in great alarm. Gracious God! how severe is this their affliction to-day! But John, looking about him, said; "I see that it is Joseph and Nicodemus." Upon this, our Lady, taking courage again, says; "Blessed be our God, who has remembered us, and sends us assistance, and has not forsaken us. Do you, my son, run to meet them." John then goes quickly to meet them; and, upon his coming up to them, they embrace each other in turn with great weeping, not being able for a full hour to speak to each other, by reason of their tender compassion, and abundant weeping and grief; they afterwards come

over against the cross. Joseph inquires, who those are with our Lady, and what has become of the other disciples. John tells him who the women are, that are there. But, touching the disciples, he answers that he does not know what has become of them, for that none of them have been there during the day. He also inquires about what had been done to our Lord, and John describes to him every thing as it took place. But when they came near the spot, bending their knees and weeping, they worshipped our Lord. Then, drawing near, they were reverently received by our Lady and her companions, who bent their knees, and inclined themselves to the ground. They, in like manner, bending their knees, and greatly mourning, continued for a long hour. At length, our Lady says; "You do well in thus remembering your Master, for He loved you greatly; and I confess that, since you have come, a new light seems to have beamed upon me; for we were at a loss what to do. May our Lord reward you!" They, on their part, answered; "We are grieved with all our heart at what has been done to Him; for the wicked have prevailed against the Righteous; gladly would we have rescued Him from so great injustice, had it been in our power. We will at least render this poor service to our Lord and Master." They then arose, and prepared to take down the Body of Jesus.

Do you now attend, as I have directed you in many places, diligently and fixedly, to the mode of taking down the sacred Body. They place two ladders one against either arm of the cross. Joseph goes up the ladder at the right side, and tries hard to draw out the nail from His hand. But this it is difficult to do; for the nail is thick and long, and strongly fixed in the wood, and, without violently bruising the hand of our Lord, it does not seem

as if it could be effected. But there is no rude violence in the act, for he does it in a loyal spirit, and it is thus our Lord graciously receives it. As soon as it is drawn out, John makes a sign to Joseph, that he should hand the nail to him, that our Lady might not see it. Then Nicodemus drew out the other from the left hand, and, in like manner, gives the nail to John. Then Nicodemus came down, and proceeded to draw out the nail which fastened the feet. Joseph, meanwhile, supported the Body of our Lord; happy Joseph! who enjoyed the privilege of thus embracing our Lord's Body! Then our Lady reverently took the right hand as it hung down, and presses it to her mouth. She gazes upon it and kisses it, with floods of tears and dolorous sighs. As soon as Joseph had drawn out the nail which fastened the feet, within a while he came down, and then they all receive the Body of our Lord, and lay it upon the ground. Our Lady receives the sacred head in her bosom, and Magdalene the feet, at which she had formerly found such grace. The others stand round, and all make great lamentation over Him, for they all mourn for Him in greatest bitterness, as one that mourneth for his only son.*

CHAPTER LXV.

THE HOUR OF COMPLINE.

After a little delay, when night was approaching, Joseph asks our Lady to permit Him to be wrapped in linen clothes, and buried. She withstood, saying, "Do

* Zech. xii. 10.

not, O my friends, take the Body of my Son so quickly; or, if you will, let me be buried with Him." Moreover, she wept with tears which nothing could assuage, as she looked on the wounds of His hands and side, first on one, then on another; as she looked at His divine countenance, and head, and saw the punctures of the thorns, the places where the hair had been plucked from the beard, and the face defiled with spittle and blood; nor could she gaze and weep enough. As to the plucking of the beard, it admits of proof from Scripture. For Isaiah says, *I gave My back to the smiters, and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair.** Thus His Mother, having diligently surveyed all these vestiges of His passion, wished for time to dwell on them at her leisure. However, as it was growing late, St. John says, "O Lady, let us grant the suit of Joseph and Nicodemus, and suffer the Body of our Lord to be composed and buried; for, if we delay too long, It may experience some insult from the Jews." At these words our Lady, full of gratitude and prudence, considering that she had been consigned to St. John's care by her Son, would stand out no longer; and, blessing Him, permitted His sacred limbs to be composed and wrapped in linen. Whereupon John, and Nicodemus, and the rest, began to wrap the Body in linen clothes, according to the custom of the Jews. Our Lady the while held His sacred head in her hands, reserving to herself the privilege of composing It, Magdalene applying herself, as usual, to the blessed feet. For when they come, in the discharge of their office of duty, near the feet, Magdalene interposes; "I beseech you, let me arrange the feet, for at these it was that I obtained mercy." Her petition being granted, she re-

* Is. l. 6.

verently took the feet into her hands, and held them. At the same moment she seemed on the point of swooning for grief; and those very feet, which she formerly wet with the tears of compunction, she now bathed with far more copious tears of grief and compassion. As she looked on those feet, so mangled, pierced, shrivelled, and clotted with blood, most bitter and profuse were her tears. For, as the Truth had said of her, *she loved much*;* therefore was it that she wept much, and chiefly in these last funeral obsequies of her Lord and Master, thus bruised, scourged, wounded, and dead, and, as it were, brought to nought. Scarcely could her heart remain in her body for grief. Rather we may well believe that, if she could, she would readily have yielded up the ghost at her Lord's feet. She saw no remedy for her grief, nor was she an adept at offices such as this. It was a new and a last duty this which she was fulfilling towards Him; and, in the discharge of it, very bitterly was her soul wounded, because she could not perform it with the exactness and solemnity she could have wished. For she would have liked to bathe the entire Body, and to anoint it, and to compose it suitably; but, neither the time nor the place favoured her wishes. She could not do more; she could not do otherwise; she did what she could.† If she did no more, at least she washed His feet with her tears; and, before she ended, she devoutly wiped them, embraced them, kissed them, wrapped them up, and arranged them carefully to the very best of her knowledge and ability. When the Body was thus prepared, they all turn their eyes to our Lady, as if waiting for her to complete the office; and all betake themselves to weeping. At length, our Lady, seeing that further

* Luke, vii. 47. † *Vid.* Mark, xiv. 8.

delay was impossible, bends over the face of her sweetest Son, and says; "O my Son, I hold Thee dead in my bosom; very bitter is this parting; pleasant and full of delight was our intercourse, nor ever gave we cause of offence to others; yet Thou, O sweetest Son, hast erewhile been slain like a malefactor. Faithfully, O my Son, have I served Thee, and Thou, me; but, in Thy last bitter agony, it was not Thy Father's will to succour Thee, and I lacked the power. Thou didst abandon Thyself for love of mankind, whom Thou wouldest redeem. Very painful and afflictive is that Redemption, in which nevertheless I joy, on account of man's salvation. Howbeit, in Thy pains and Thy death I have great cause of sorrow; for I know that Thou never sinnedst, and that, without a cause, Thou wert slain by this most bitter and shameful death. And now, O my Son, our union is broken, and I must part from Thee. I will bury Thee then, I, Thy most sorrowful Mother; but, Thy sepulture over, whither shall I betake myself? Where shall I tarry, O my Son? How shall I be able to live without Thee? Willingly would I be buried with Thee, that, where Thou art, there I might be with Thee. But, forasmuch as my body cannot be buried with Thine, let me be buried with Thee in mind; let me bury my soul in the sepulchre with Thy Body; to Thee I resign it, to Thee I give it in charge. O my Son, how bitter is this parting!" And again she shed torrents of tears, and bathed His face much more effectually than Magdalene His feet. Moreover, she reverently and devoutly washed His sacred face, and kissed His mouth and eyes, and then wrapped His head in a napkin and carefully adjusted it. Then a second time she blessed Him. Then all fell on their knees and worshipped Him, and, kissing His feet, raise His adorable Body, and carry

Him to the sepulchre. Our Lady held the head and the shoulders, Magdalene the feet, and the rest arrange themselves between. There was near the place of crucifixion a sepulchre, of the length of our church* or thereabouts, in which they reverently laid Him, on bended knees, with floods of tears, and loud sobbings, and frequent sighs. Then His Mother blessed Him again, and, embracing Him, stays watching Her much-loved Son. At length they remove her, and place a great stone at the door of the sepulchre. On the subject of this tomb, St. Bede says, that it was a circular cavity, formed out of a rock, not higher than that a man might touch the top by raising his arm, with an entrance from the east; and that the place where the Body of our Lord lay was towards the north, carved out of the same rock, and about seven feet in length.

CHAPTER LXVI.

MEDITATION AFTER COMPLINE.

Joseph then, wishing to return to the city after he had thus completed his pious office, says to our Lady, "O Lady, I entreat you for God's sake, and for the love of your Son and my Master, if it please you, to retire to my house, for I know that you have no house of your own. I pray you then to use mine as your own, for all that I have is yours;" and in like manner spoke Nicodemus. O what a subject of compassion is here! The Mother of

* St. Bonaventure's allusions to spots well known to his readers will have been before observed.

God has not where to lay her head, and she must pass these days of her sorrow and widowhood under another's roof. Truly days of widowhood are these, for our Lord Jesus was to her both Son and Spouse, Father and Mother, and every good; and now that He is dead she has lost all together. Truly widowed is she and deserted, and has not where to retire. Then our Lady, humbly inclining and returning thanks, answered that she was entrusted to John. And, when they still continued to urge her, John said that he wished to take her to Mount Sion. to the house in which his Master had supped the evening before with His disciples, and to remain there with her. But they, first inclining to our Lady, and adoring the holy sepulchre, went away; and the others, as the Gospel says, remained sitting over against the sepulchre.* But on the approach of night St. John says to our Lady, "It is not seemly to continue here too long, or to return at night into the city; and therefore, if it please you, Lady, let us retire." Then our Lady, rising and bending her knee, embraces the Sepulchre, and blessing it says; "My Son, since I am no longer able to stay with Thee, I recommend Thee to Thy Father." And, raising her eyes to heaven, she says with tears and a heart full of loving grief; "Eternal Father, I commend to Thy care my Son, and with Him my soul, which I resign to Thee." They then began to retire. But, when they came to the Cross, she bent her knee and said; "Here rested my beloved Son, and here was poured forth His most precious Blood." And, after her example, all did the same. For we may well believe that our Lady was the first to pay this devotion to the Cross. They then retire towards the city, and along the road she frequently turned to look be-

* Matt. xxvii. 61.

hind her. But upon their reaching a spot, beyond which they could no longer catch a sight of the Sepulchre and the Cross, she turned, and, bowing herself, knelt down most devoutly; and, after her example, all did the same. When they drew near to the city, the sisters of our Lady veiled her like a widow, enveloping her face entirely, and led the way; whilst our Lady followed between John and Magdalene, thus sorrowfully veiled. Then Magdalene, upon their entering the city, wishing to take the way which led to her house, and to conduct them there, arranged that they should do so, and said; "O Lady, I pray you, for the love of my Master, to come to my house, for we shall be better there; and you know how graciously He took pleasure in coming to it. It is your own, as is every thing that I have. I beg you to come." And upon this they renewed their lamentation. But our Lady kept silence, and made signs towards John, whom Magdalene still continued to entreat. But he answered; "It is more meet that we go to Mount Sion, especially as we shall there be better able to communicate with our friends. Do you rather accompany our Lady thither." Magdalene answered; "You well know that I will go with her wherever she goes, and will never leave her." On their entering the city, many devout virgins and matrons come to meet her, as soon as they hear of her arrival, and accompany her on her way, and condole with her, with great lamentation. Many devout men also condoled with her, as they passed amongst them, and were moved to tears, and said; "Truly a great injustice has been done to-day by our rulers against the Son of this Lady; and God has wrought great wonders in His behalf; let them take good heed what it is they have done." But, on their arriving at the house, our Lady, turning towards the good

women that accompanied her, and rendering them her thanks, inclined to them with humble courtesy. And they inclining to her, and reverently saluting her, all began to make great lamentation. Our Lady then went into the house with Magdalene and her two sisters. But John, placing himself at the door, courteously requested of the rest that they would return to their own homes, since the hour was late; and, giving them thanks, he closed the door. Then our Lady, casting her eyes round the house, thus spoke; "My sweetest Son, where art Thou, for I no longer see Thee here? O John, where is my Son? O Magdalene, where is thy Father, who loved thee so tenderly? O beloved sisters, where is our Son? He has gone from us, He who was our joy, our sweetness, and the light of our eyes; ah! and in what a sea of sorrow you too well know. Ah! this it is which redoubles my grief, when I think of His whole Body torn with wounds, His Soul filled with anguish, when I think of Him parched with thirst, goaded, oppressed with insults, driven with violence, whilst we could give Him no assistance; all forsook Him, and it was His Almighty Father's pleasure not to succour Him. How rapidly, too, all these things followed one upon another, you saw yourselves. What wretch so vile was ever condemned with such shameful and cruel haste? O my Son, at night wast Thou perfidiously betrayed and taken; at the third hour the following morning condemned, and crucified at the sixth; and thus art Thou dead! O my Son, how bitter is this my separation from Thee, and the recollection of Thy most shameful death!" At length John besought her to desist, and comforted her. Do you, to the best of your power, obey her wishes, and wait upon her, and offer her consolation, and minister to her as you best can. Beg of

her and the rest to take some refection, for they are all fasting; then beg a blessing of our Lady, and of each of the others who are with her, and so retire.

CHAPTER LXVII.

HOLY SATURDAY; OUR LADY AND HER COMPANIONS.

On the morning of the Sabbath, our Lady and the other holy women, her companions, together with St. John, stayed at home with closed doors, overwhelmed with grief and anguish, like children who had lost their only parent. They sat together, not speaking, but remembering; ever and anon they looked at each other with quick, hurried glances, as is the way of persons in some great and depressing calamity. A knock is heard at the door, and they are full of apprehension; for they feared everything; their sense of security was gone. However, John went to the door, and, looking, recognized Peter; then, turning round to his companions, he said, "It is Peter." Our Lady answered, "Open to him." Thereupon Peter came in, covered with shame, and weeping and sobbing bitterly; then all began to weep, and could not speak for grief. Afterwards the rest of the disciples in succession entered weeping. At length they cease from tears, and begin to speak of their Lord. Peter says, "I am confounded at myself; I ought not to speak in your presence, nor to show myself before men; I, who so forsook and denied my Lord, who loved me so much." Likewise also the rest, beating their breasts, and shedding floods of tears, bitterly accused themselves for leaving

their sweetest Lord as they did. Then our Lady says, "The Good Master and faithful Shepherd hath indeed left us, and we remain like orphans; but I confidently trust that we shall soon have Him again; and, as you well know, my Son is very gracious, and loves you all dearly. Doubt not, then, that He will be mercifully reconciled to you, and willingly forgive you every injury and every fault you have committed. So great, indeed, by permission of His Eternal Father, was their rage against Him, and to such heights did their malice proceed, that you could have rendered Him no assistance, even had you been with Him. Do not then be troubled." Peter answers, "Truly, O Lady, it is even as you say. For I too, who had such opportunity of seeing the beginnings of their fury, was so panic-struck in the house of Caiaphas that I hardly thought I could escape, and so I denied Him. For I remembered not His words, in which He foretold me of this, till the moment when He looked upon me." Hereupon Magdalene asks what it was which He foretold him, and he answers concerning the denial, and tells the whole history; adding, that at the Supper He told them other things about His Passion. Then says our Lady, "I would fain hear of these things, which He spake and did at the Supper." Whereupon Peter makes a sign to John to tell her. Then John begins and relates the whole; and so they converse together about those things, which our Lord had done when among them. First one speaks, then another, and thus they pass the whole day in discoursing about Him. O how attentively did Magdalene listen! Yet more attentively still, our Lady. O, how often that day did she say, during the narration of His words and deeds, "Blessed be my Son Jesus!" Look diligently at them and compassionate them, for they are in great distress to-

day, yea, the very greatest. For what a sight is it to behold our Lady, whose name both in heaven and earth is blessed above all creatures, and the princes of the churches and of all people, the leaders of the whole Divine army, thus shut up, full of alarm, in some poor little dwelling, ignorant what to do, save only that they strengthened one another, conferring together of the deeds and words of their sweetest Lord. Nevertheless our Lady was possessed of a calm and peaceful heart, for most sure was the hope which she had of the Resurrection of her Son; thus in her alone there remained a firm faith even on that Sabbath, and therefore it is that the Saturday is kept in her honour.* Yet our Lady could not remain joyful, by reason of the death of her sweetest Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the evening, after sun-set, when they were allowed to work, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to buy spices to make ointments. Late, too, the evening before, when they returned from the burial of our Lord, they began to make their preparations, which they continued till sun-set; afterwards they rested. For they were bound to keep the Sabbath from sun-set on Friday till sun-set on Saturday. Now then they go forth to buy spices. Behold them diligently as they walk along with sorrowful looks, like widows, and apply at a magazine of drugs, kept perhaps by some devout tradesman, who compassionates them, and readily satisfies their wishes. They ask for spices, and choose the best they can find; and, having paid the price, return, and set themselves to make the ointments for their Lord. Behold them diligently; see with what humility, devotion, and faithfulness they are labouring for their Lord, with many tears and sighs

* *i. e.* in the Churches of the Roman obedience.

from their inmost breast. Our Lady and the Apostles observe them, perhaps assist them. Which done, they go to rest for the night. This, then, is your meditation for the Holy Sabbath, upon our Lady, her devout female companions, and the disciples.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

HOLY SATURDAY; OUR LORD DESCENDS INTO HADES.

It now comes to consider what our Lord did on this same Sabbath-day. Immediately after His death, He went down to Hades, to the holy Fathers, and stayed among them. Then they were in glory; for the sight of the Lord is perfect glory. Here consider and observe how unspeakable was His kindness in going down into hell; how great His love; how great His humility. For He might have sent one of His angels there, and have released all His servants, and presented Himself where He pleased; but this would not have agreed with His infinite love, and profound humility. He went down, therefore, in His own person, and visited them, not as servants, but as friends, He, the Lord of all, and abode with them in that place of departed souls till near daybreak on the Sunday. Think well on these points, admire, and strive to imitate. The holy Fathers were in high jubilee at His approach, and filled with infinite delight; every pain, every disquietude was banished at once; and they stand before Him, singing canticles of praise, on the which songs you may meditate in the following way. Imagine their glorious bodies as they were after the Resurrection,

and together with them the most loving soul of our Lord Jesus Christ. As soon, then, as they became conscious of His saving approach, they meet Him with joy, mutually exhorting one another, and saying; "*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He hath visited and redeemed His people,*"* with the rest of that Divine hymn; "*Lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh;*† *Rise, O Jerusalem, loose thyself from the bands of thy neck;*‡ behold thy Saviour cometh, to loose us from our chains. *Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in.*§ We worship Thee, O Christ, and bless Thee, O Thou most loving God." And, falling down, they worshipped Him with joy and great gladness. Consider them, for they stand near Him with reverence and great delight, and countenances beaming with joy, and speak the foregoing words in His presence; and in suchlike praises, and canticles, and jubilations, continued they in the place of the departed till near daybreak on Sunday. With them also was a multitude of the Angels, singing praises with them. Then our Lord took them, and led them in triumph out of Hades, and set them in the Paradise of delights. Then, after a short space passed in joy with them, with Elias and Enoch, who recognize Him, He told them that the time of His Resurrection was at hand. Then they all fell prostrate, and said; "Go, O Lord, Thou King of Glory, and return quickly, if it pleaseth Thee, for we burn with loving desire to behold Thy most glorious Body."

* Luke, i. 68. † Ib. xxi. 28.
‡ Is. lii. 2. § Ps. xxiv. 7.

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE GREAT EASTER DAY. OUR LORD RISES AND APPEARS TO HIS MOTHER.

Our Lord Jesus very early in the morning came with a glorious multitude of Angels to the sepulchre, and took again to Himself that most holy Body; and, the sepulchre itself being closed, went forth, having risen again by His own power. At the same hour Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome began their journey to the sepulchre, with the ointments they had prepared.

Meanwhile, our Lady remained at home and prayed, as we may devoutly conceive, in words of affection such as these: "O most merciful, O most loving Father! my Son, as Thou knowest, hath died; He hath been crucified between two thieves, and I have buried Him with my own hands; but Thou art able to restore Him to me unharmed; I pray Thy Majesty to send Him to me. Why delays He so long to come to me? restore Him, I beseech Thee, for my soul can find no rest until I see Him. O dearest Son! what hath befallen Thee? what is Thy employment? why dost Thou delay? I pray Thee tarry no longer; for Thou hast said, *On the third day I will rise again.* Is not this, my Son, the third day? for not yesterday, but before yesterday, was that great, that bitter day; the day of suffering and of death, of clouds and darkness, of Thy separation from me and Thy death. This, then, my Son, is the third day; arise, my Glory, my Only Good, and return. Beyond

all other things I long to see Thee. Let Thy return comfort whom Thy departure did so bitterly grieve. Return, then, my Beloved; come, Lord Jesus; come, my only Hope; come to me, my Son!" And while she thus prayed, and gently poured forth tears, lo! suddenly our Lord Jesus came in raiment all white, with serene countenance, beautiful, glorious, and glad. Then she embraced Him with tears of joy, and, pressing her face to His, clasped Him eagerly to her heart, reclining wholly in His arms, while He tenderly supported her. Afterwards, as they sat down together, she anxiously gazed upon Him, and found that He was still the same in countenance, and in the scars of His hands, seeking over His whole person, to know if all pain had left Him. They remain and happily converse together, passing their Easter with delight and love. O what an Easter was this!

CHAPTER LXX.

MAGDALENE AND THE OTHER TWO MARIES COME TO THE SEPULCHRE, AND PETER AND JOHN RUN TOGETHER.*

But Magdalene and the other two Maries were going, as I said, to the sepulchre with ointments. When, then, they passed the gate of the city, they recalled to their memory the sufferings and pains of their Master, and, at every place where anything observable had been done against Him or by Him, they stopped a little while, bowing the

* John, xx. 1, &c.

knee and kissing the ground; sending forth groans and sighs; saying, "Here we met Him with the cross on His shoulder, when His Mother almost died with grief; here He turned Himself to the women; here He laid down the cross from weariness, and on that stone He rested a little while; here with such cruelty and violence they urged Him more quickly forwards, and made Him, as it were, to run; here they stripped Him; here they crucified Him!" And then with a great cry and torrent of tears, falling on their faces they reverently saluted the cross and kissed it, tinged as it was even yet with the precious blood of the Lord. Then rising, and going on to the sepulchre, they said, *Who will roll back for us the stone from the mouth of the sepulchre?* And when they looked up, they saw the stone rolled away, and an Angel of the Lord sitting upon it, who says to them, *Fear not ye,* and the rest, as it is related in the Gospel. But they, cheated of their hope, (for they had thought to find the Lord's Body,) not attending to the words of the Angel, return in terror to the disciples, saying that the Body had been carried away. Then Peter and John run to the sepulchre: observe them well; they run; Magdalene and her companions run behind them; all run to seek their Lord, their heart, their soul; they run, having much trust and much zeal, yet withal much perplexity. But, when they had come to the sepulchre and looked in, they found not the Body, but they saw the linen clothes and napkin, and departed. Do you compassionate them, for they are in great affliction; they seek their Lord, and find Him not, and know not where further they should seek Him; sorrowing, therefore, and weeping, they departed.

CHAPTER LXXI.

OUR LORD APPEARS TO THE THREE MARIES.*

But the Maries still remained in the same place, and looking into the sepulchre saw two Angels standing in white raiment, who say to them; "Why seek ye the Living among the dead?" But neither did they observe their words nor receive any consolation from the vision of Angels, for they sought not Angels, but the Lord of Angels. The other two Maries frightened, and, as it were, wrapped up in grief, drew themselves back some little distance, and sat down sorrowing; but Magdalene, not knowing what else she should do, and unable to live without her Master, since she found Him not there, and knew not where to seek Him, stood at the sepulchre without, making lamentation. Looking then a second time into the sepulchre, because she was in constant hope of seeing Him again in the place where she had buried Him, she saw the same Angels sitting there; who say unto her, "Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?" She answered, *They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.* Observe the wonderful effect of love; she had heard a little while before from one Angel that He had risen, and afterwards from the two that He lived; and yet she remembered it not, but answers, "I know not." Love was the cause of this; because, as Origen says on this passage, "her soul was not where she herself was, but where her Master was. She knew not

* Matt. xxviii. 9. John, xx. 11, &c.

to think, to speak, to hear, except of Him." But while she thus sorrowed, and received no comfort from the presence of Angels, from love of her, her Master no longer restrained Himself. He comes therefore to the sepulchre in the garden where Magdalene was, and says to her, *Woman, whom seekest thou? why weepest thou?* And she, not yet knowing Him, as though distraught, answers Him, *Sir, if Thou have borne Him hence, tell me where Thou hast laid Him; and I will take Him away.* Observe her well; how with weeping countenance, and with beseeching earnestness, she prays Him to tell her of Him whom she seeks; for she was always hoping to hear some tidings of her Beloved. Then our Lord said to her, "Mary;" and she, as coming to new life, and knowing Him by His voice, with unspeakable joy said, "Rabbi," that is to say, Master, "Thou art the Lord whom I sought; wherefore hast Thou so long hidden Thyself from me?" And running to His feet she desired to kiss them; but the Lord wishing to raise her mind to heavenly things, that she might not henceforward seek Him on earth, said, *Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren, and say unto them, that I ascend unto My Father and* their *Father, etc.* And He added, "Did not I foretel to thee that on the third day I should rise again; how is it, therefore, that thou soughtest Me in the sepulchre?" She answered, "I tell Thee, O Master, that so great sorrow had filled my heart for the bitterness of Thy death and passion, that, forgetting all else, I remembered nothing except Thy dead Body and the place where I had buried it; and for this cause I brought the ointment this morning. Blessed be Thy Majesty who hast vouchsafed to rise again and return to us!" Here then again we see a great Easter.

But though at first our Lord gave her that answer, I can scarcely believe but that she touched Him affectionately before He departed thence, and kissed His hands and feet. But He gave this first answer as it were with a purposed reserve,* either because He was manifesting Himself to her at the time in that form under which she had been accustomed to think of Him (according to the common interpretation), or because, as I said, He wished to raise her mind to heavenly things, as St. Bernard seems to hint. For the religious mind will surely believe, that her whom He visited in so loving and peculiar a manner, before all who are mentioned in Scripture, He visited that He might bring her joy, not perplexity; He spoke that word then with a mysterious purpose, not inexorably; for the most merciful Lord is neither harsh nor inexorable, least of all to them who love Him. After abiding with her some little time, our Lord prepared to depart, saying, that He must visit others also. Then Magdalene, now resigned to the thought of parting with Him,† says, "I see, O Lord, that Thy abode with us will not be henceforward as it hath been hitherto; I beseech Thee, then, forget me not: remember, Lord, all the blessings which Thou hast given me, remember Thy frequent presence with me, the love Thou hast had to me; be mind-

* dispensativè; "withdrawing Himself from her," that He might not encourage that earthly view of Himself to which she was disposed; and the rather, as He was manifesting Himself to her in His wonted form. St. Leo paraphrases our Lord's words to St. Mary Magdalene thus; "I withhold thee for higher privileges ... when I shall have ascended .... then thou shalt touch Me more perfectly and more truly," &c.—St. Leo, 2nd Sermon on the Ascension.

† Quasi alterata, sicut nolens ab eo unquam discedere, "like an altered person, in respect of her unwillingness," &c.; or, "though unwilling, yet changing her will at His word." The context seems to require this.

ful of me, O Lord my God." And our Lord answered her; "Fear not, be strong and of good courage, for I will be ever with thee." Then when He had given her His blessing and had departed, she comes to her companions and tells them all that has passed; and they depart with her, rejoicing for His resurrection, but grieving that they had not seen Him. While these three Maries then were proceeding together, before they came to the city, our Lord Jesus appeared to them, saying, "All hail!" And they, rejoicing beyond all words, fell down before Him and embraced His feet. Here then too, in like manner, they seek and behold, and find joy in answer to their search, and celebrate a great Easter. But our Lord Jesus says to them; "Tell My brethren that they come to Galilee; there shall they see Me, as I foretold them." You see that the Master of Humility calls His disciples brethren; hath He forgotten this virtue? But do you, if you would derive understanding and comfort from what has been said, remember what I told you before, that in all these places and doings you should be so affected in mind as though you were present in body. And the same of the circumstances now to follow.

CHAPTER LXXII.

OUR LORD APPEARS TO JAMES THE LESS AND TO PETER.*

Our Lord appeared to James the Less, who had vowed that he would not eat except he should see the Lord

* Luke, xxiv. 34. 1 Cor. xv. 5. 7.

risen. This is related by St. Jerome. Again, when Magdalene and her companions return home, and relate to the disciples that our Lord hath risen, Peter sorrowing that he hath not seen his Lord, and finding no rest to his soul from the earnestness of his love, departed from them, and went alone towards the sepulchre; for he knew not in what other place to seek Him; and, as he went, our Lord Jesus appeared to him, and said, "Peace be with thee, Simon." Then Peter, smiting his breast and falling on the ground, with tears exclaimed, "Lord, I confess my sin, that I deserted Thee and repeatedly denied Thee," and kissed His feet. But our Lord raised him from the ground, and kissed him, saying; "Peace be with thee; fear not, all thy sins are forgiven; I knew it well, and foretold it to thee. Now, therefore, go and strengthen thy brethren, and be of good cheer, for I have overcome death and all your adversaries and enemies." Here, then, likewise, we see a great Easter. They remain and converse together, and Peter watchfully regards Him, and marks each particular; and, having received His blessing, returns to the disciples and recounts all that had passed. Now, you are to know that nothing is contained in the Gospel on His appearance to our Lady; but I mentioned it at the first, because the Church appears to hold it.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

OUR LORD'S RETURN TO THE HOLY FATHERS AFTER THE RESURRECTION.

Our Lord Jesus then, when He departed from Peter, as He had not yet since His resurrection visited the holy Fathers whom He had left in the Paradise of delights, returned to them, moving onwards in a white robe, attended by a multitude of Angels. And they, seeing Him afar off coming to them with so great glory, receive Him with unspeakable delight and jubilee, with songs and praises, saying; "Behold our King! O, come let us go forth to meet our Saviour. Great is the beginning of His Kingdom, and there shall be to it no end; a holy Day hath risen upon us; come all, and let us worship the Lord." And they fell down before Him and worshipped Him; then rising, and abiding with Him, they filled up the measure of their praises, saying; "The Lion of the tribe of Judah hath prevailed;* my heart is glad and my glory hath rejoiced; Thou makest us full of joy with Thy countenance, and at Thy right hand there is pleasure for evermore.† Thou hast risen from the dead, O our Glory, we will be glad and rejoice in Thee; Thy Kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion endureth throughout all generations. And we depart not from Thee; Thou shalt raise us up, and we will magnify Thy name; the Forerunner is for us entered, made an High-priest for ever.‡ This is the Day which the Lord hath

* Rev. v. 5. † Ps. xvi. 10, 12. ‡ Heb. vi. 20.

made, we will rejoice and be glad in it; now hath risen to us the Day of Redemption, of long-expected succour, of eternal joy; this Day the heavens have begun to drop honey through the whole world, for the Lord is made King from the cross. The Lord is King, and hath put on glorious apparel, the Lord hath put on His apparel and girded Himself with strength; O, sing unto Him a new song, for He hath done marvellous things, with His own right hand and with His holy arm hath He gotten Himself the victory; but we, His people and the sheep of His pasture, O, come let us worship and fall down before Him." When the evening drew nigh, our Lord Jesus said to them; "I have compassion on My brethren, for they are overwhelmed with sorrow and dismay at My death, and are scattered as sheep having no shepherd, and they greatly desire to see Me. I will go, then, and show Myself to them, and strengthen and comfort them, and will speedily return to you." Then the holy Fathers, falling down before Him, said; "Be it, O Lord, according to Thy word."

CHAPTER LXXIV.

OUR LORD APPEARS TO TWO DISCIPLES AS THEY WENT TO EMMAUS.*

WHILE two of His disciples were going to a village named Emmaus, as despairing of Him, and were in sorrowful mood conversing on those things which had

* Luke, xxiv. 13, &c.

taken place, our Lord Jesus came and joined Himself to their company under the appearance of a stranger, asking them questions, and giving them answers, and uttering wholesome words, as you have in the Gospel. And at length, on their earnest entreaty, He went in with them, and disclosed Himself to them. To this scene then carefully apply your mind, and consider the mercy and loving-kindness of your Lord. First, in that His burning love could not endure that they should thus wander from the truth, and be sad. He, their truly constant friend, attached companion, and merciful Lord, joins Himself to them, asks them the cause of their sadness, and expounds to them the Scriptures, making their hearts burn within them, to the destruction of every corrupt taint. Thus He acts daily with us in our spiritual life; for if, when weighed down by some trouble or sluggishness of spirit, we speak of Him, straightway He is at hand, giving strength and light to our hearts, yea, and kindling them into love of Him; for the best remedy against such grievous disorders is to speak concerning God. Hence the prophet says, *O how sweet are Thy words unto my throat, yea, sweeter than honey unto my mouth;** and again, *Thy word is tried to the uttermost, and Thy servant loveth it.*† And the same is true of meditation concerning God; whence the prophet says, *My heart was hot within me; and while I was thus musing the fire kindled.*‡

In the second place, consider His goodness, not only in His love, but in His deep lowliness; for observe Him in how lowly a fashion He walks with them; He, the Lord of all, walks with His, as though one of themselves. He is an example to us that we do likewise. Observe

* Ps. cxix. 103. † Ps. cxix. 140. ‡ Ps. xxxix. 4.

too His lowliness in another particular, that He disdained not the disciples of a lower class; for these were not of the number of the Apostles, but of the humbler disciples; and yet He joins Himself to them in a friendly manner, and walks and converses with them. Not so the world; for they do not willingly converse or walk, unless with men of renown and power. In another respect, too, His lowliness shines forth; for, if you observe the proud, you will see that they refuse to expend their more lofty words upon a few: but our Lord discourses of His secret things even with two; He despises not a few, nor even one; witness His communications to the Samaritan woman.

In the third place, consider our Lord's goodness in this matter, how He instructs His disciples in holy living; how He refreshes and comforts them! Observe Him then how He makes as though He would have gone further, that He may increase their desire of His company, that He may be invited and detained by them; and how afterwards He mercifully goes in with them, takes bread and blesses it, and with His own most sacred Hands breaks it and gives it into their hands, and reveals Himself to them. Daily He does the same with us invisibly; for He wishes to be detained and invited by desires, prayers, and holy meditations, and therefore we ought always to pray, and not to faint, as He Himself has taught us. And all this at Emmaus He did for our admonition, namely, that we should apply ourselves to works of love and hospitality; and to show how that it suffices not to hear or read divine counsels, unless they be fulfilled in act; on which last you may be more fully instructed in the homily of Gregory upon this Gospel. Yet rendered He not Himself for a long time present with His disciples, but straightway, having given them bread,

vanished from their sight; for He desired to comfort the others also, even by the same means whereby He had comforted these.

CHAPTER LXXV.

OUR LORD APPEARS TO THOSE ASSEMBLED TOGETHER ON THE DAY OF THE RESURRECTION.*

But these two disciples returned straightway to Jerusalem, and found the others assembled together, Thomas only being absent, and related to them these circumstances; while they heard in return, that the Lord had risen indeed, and appeared to Simon. Then our Lord Jesus coming in to them, the doors being shut, stood in the midst, and said to them, *Peace be unto you.* And the disciples falling down on the ground before Him, and confessing their sin in having so deserted Him, received Him with great eagerness. Then our Lord says, "Rise, my brethren, for all your sins are forgiven you;" and He remains among them, conversing as a friend, and shows them His hands and side, and opens their understanding that they may understand the Scriptures and know of His Resurrection. He asks of them if they have anything to eat; and eats before them part of a broiled fish, and of a honeycomb; He breathes upon them, and says, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost.* You see how full are all these things of joy and sweetness. Then were the disciples glad when they saw our

* Luke, xxiv. 33, 34. John, xx. 19—23.

Lord; they who before were terrified rejoice in His presence; O how gladly did they place before Him that which He should eat, how zealously did they tend Him, how happily stand near Him! O how blessed is that room, and how full of grace to dwell in! Do you not here, too, if you have any devotion, celebrate a great Easter? Truly I think so. But our Lord stayed with them only a little while, for it was now late; and yet haply they urged Him to abide with them a little longer, praying that He would not so soon depart. At length our Lord gave them all His blessing, and departed from among them. They, meanwhile, falling down before Him, prayed Him speedily to return, and remained hungering and thirsting for our Lord, whom they had been wont so frequently to see; calling Him back to them with many sighs and aspirations. You see how often this day you have celebrated Easter; for all these Appearances were on Easter Day. But perhaps you have heard, and yet not felt, the joy; even because neither in His sufferings did you feel sorrow. For I well believe that if you were able to sympathize with His passion, and preserved your mind collected and intent, not dissipated upon worldly objects, or needless cares, or curious speculations, you would on each one of these occasions feel Easter. And this you might experience on each single Lord's Day, if you would on the Friday and Saturday prepare yourself for it with your whole heart by meditation on our Lord's Passion; especially since the Apostle says, that *As ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.**

* 2 Cor. i. 7.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

OUR LORD APPEARS TO HIS DISCIPLES ON THE OCTAVE DAY OF EASTER, WHEN ST. THOMAS WAS WITH THEM.*

But when the Octave Day of the Resurrection came, our Lord Jesus again appeared to the disciples, the doors being shut. And Thomas was with them, who had not been there the first day, and who, when the others told him that they had seen our Lord, answered, *Unless I see in His hands*, and the rest, as is contained in the Gospel, *I will not believe*. The Good Shepherd then, caring tenderly for His little flock, says to them, *Peace be unto you*. Then saith He to Thomas, *Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands, and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into My side, and be not faithless, but believing*. Then Thomas fell down before Him, and touched the marks of the Lord, and said, *My Lord and my God!* for he saw Him as Man, and believed in Him as God. He confessed, too, as the others had done, his sin in having left Him; but our Lord raised him up, and said, "Fear not, all thy sins are forgiven thee." But this circumstance of the doubting of Thomas was permitted for a purpose, viz. that the Resurrection of our Lord might be established by more certain proofs. But in this place behold Him carefully, and observe His wonted mercy, lowliness, and burning love; how that He shows His wounds to Thomas and the other disciples, that He may take away all cloud and uncertainty from their

* John, xx. 24—29.

minds, for their and our benefit. Our Lord preserved these marks of His wounds chiefly for three reasons: 1. That He might give to the Apostles proof of His Resurrection. 2. That He may show them to His Father when He wills to appease His wrath and intercede for us, for He is our Intercessor. 3. That He may exhibit them to the reprobate in the Day of Judgment.* Our Lord Jesus, then, abides with His Mother and disciples for some little space, speaking on the kingdom of God; and they abide with Him in great joy, hearing those words of high import, and beholding His face radiant with joy and beauty. Observe them well, thus standing round, but our Lady with closer intimacy, very near to Him, and Magdalene always at His feet. Do you also stand reverently, yet far off, unless, perchance, moved with pity He call you nearer. At length He speaks to them that they go into Galilee, to Mount Tabor, as it is said, and that He will there appear to them; then, having given them His blessing, He departed from them. But they remained, as before, hungering and thirsting for His presence, yet very greatly strengthened.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

OUR LORD APPEARS TO THE DISCIPLES IN GALILEE.†

After this, as the disciples were proceeding to the appointed place, our Lord Jesus appeared to them again, saying, *All power is given unto Me in Heaven and in*

* *Vid.* Rev. i. 7. † Matt. xxviii. 18—20.

Earth: go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And be of good cheer, for *I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.* And when He came, they worshipped Him; and now they abide with Him in great joy. Observe them well, and observe those things which He has just said to them; for they are very lofty. He shows to them how He is Lord of all; He gives them the command for preaching; He gives them the form for baptism; He gives them exceeding strength, while He says that He shall be with them always. You see how great happiness He imparts to them, and how many displays of love He makes to them. When our Lord then had said these things, He gave them His blessing, and vanished out of their sight.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

OUR LORD APPEARS TO THE DISCIPLES AT THE SEA OF TIBERIAS.*

But the disciples still remained in Galilee; and on a certain occasion seven of them went to fish at the sea of Tiberias, but during the whole night caught nothing; and in the morning our Lord appeared to them again, and stood on the sea-shore. But do you in this place observe all the circumstances of His appearance; for they are full of sweetness. Our Lord asked whether they

* John, xxi. 1, &c.

had taken anything? and when they answered no, said, *Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.* They let down the net, therefore, and caught a great quantity of fishes. John therefore said to Peter, *It is the Lord;* then Peter, being naked, girt himself with his coat, and hurried through the sea to meet Him, while the others came in the boat. And, having landed, they found fish laid on a fire of coals, and bread prepared for them, for our Lord had prepared it. He caused also some of the fish which they had caught to be taken and roasted; and, eating with them, He celebrated with them a joyful festival and entertainment on the sea-shore; however, according to His wonted lowliness, He ministered unto them, and gave them bread, and brake it, and likewise gave them of the fishes. They abide then, those seven disciples, with great joy in the company of their Lord, and, eating with Him, behold His most welcome and gladdening countenance, and rejoice in their hearts; they receive from His most sacred hands pleasant food, and are refreshed no less in spirit than in body. What a feast is this! Behold well each particular, and, if you can, receive nourishment with them. Observe, nevertheless, the circumstances which follow, for they are full of beauty and of profit. For when that joyous feast was ended, our Lord says to Peter, *Lovest thou Me more than these?* and Peter answers, *Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee;* our Lord says to him, *Feed My lambs*, and the rest. Thus asking him this question three times, He committed to him His flock. In which thing observe our Lord's wonted mercy, love, and lowliness; for you see plainly with what zealous affection He urges and renews His charge, and commends our souls, His sheep, to Peter. After this, our Lord foretels to Peter his death, saying, *When thou wast young,* and the rest; signifying that He

should glorify God by the suffering of the cross. And when Peter asked concerning John, *What shall this man do?* our Lord answered, *If I will that he tarry till I come*— as though He said, "I will not that he follow Me by the path of suffering, but he shall rest in an old age of contemplation." But the other disciples understood that he should not die; yet were this no great blessing, since it were better to depart and be with Christ. You have observed how many and how great things were said and done at this Appearance. After this, our Lord vanished from their sight, and went, as was His wont, to the holy Fathers; but the disciples remained with great joy, and afterwards returned to Jerusalem, &c.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

OUR LORD APPEARS TO MORE THAN FIVE HUNDRED BRETHREN AT ONCE;* ALSO ON OTHER APPEARANCES.

AFTERWARDS our Lord appeared to more than five hundred brethren at once, as the Apostle tells us; but where, or when, is not said; and our merciful Lord remaining with them, preaching and speaking concerning the kingdom of God, filled them with great delight. You have then twelve† Appearances of our Lord from His Resurrection to His Ascension, besides the two presently to be mentioned in connection with His Ascension. You should

* 1 Cor. xv. 6.

† This includes, besides the Appearance to the Blessed Virgin, a traditionary one to St. Joseph of Arimathea.

know, however, that not all are mentioned in the Gospel; for how He appeared to His Mother is nowhere written; but pious belief is as I have related it. How to James, the Apostle to the Corinthians has told us, and blessed St. Jerome also relates it; and of that to the five hundred brethren the Apostle has written in the same place; the rest are recorded in the Gospel. You may meditate also on even more; for it is probable that our most merciful Lord often visited His Mother, and disciples, and Magdalene His beloved servant, strengthening and comforting those who had suffered such exceeding sorrow and terror at the time of His passion. This blessed Augustine seems to think, who says, speaking of the time after His resurrection, "Not every thing is written; His intercourse with them was frequent." In this too you may, after your ordinary custom, observe the mercy, love, and lowliness of our Lord, of which we have often made mention, and which shine forth in all His deeds; namely, that after He had gloriously conquered and risen again, He vouchsafed still to remain absent from His home for forty days, that He might support and strengthen His disciples. Justly, after the course of so many years, after so many labours and sorrows, after so shameful and bitter a death, might He have returned in triumph to His Glory, and by His Angels have strengthened and supported the Apostles at His pleasure. But, because His love endured not this, He willed to abide with them in person, appearing to them for forty days with many different circumstances, and speaking concerning the Kingdom of God. For them He did this, and for us; but we regard it not. He loved thee exceedingly, and is not loved again; whereas, from such and so great a centre of heat, we ought not to receive warmth only, but to be set on fire.

CHAPTER LXXX.

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD.

Touching the Ascension of our Lord Jesus, pious reader, you ought to awaken your heart, and if you have before placed yourself in the midst of His words and actions, much more should you do it now, with all the powers of your soul. For this solemnity surpasses all others, as I will show you more clearly below. And let this at least animate you to a lively attention, that our Lord is now on the point of withdrawing in His bodily presence, having finished the course of His pilgrimage. For which reason you should contemplate His words and actions with particular attention. For every faithful soul ought to observe her Spouse, her Lord and her God, with especial heed, now that He is on the point of leaving her, and to embrace with the most intimate affection all that is said and done by Him, and to recommend herself to Him with increased devotion and humility, and wholly to withdraw herself from all other thoughts. On the Fortieth day, then, from His Resurrection, our Lord Jesus, knowing that His hour was come, that He should pass out of this world to the Father, having loved His own, now truly loved them unto the end.*

Taking then with Him, from the earthly Paradise, the holy Fathers and the other souls, and giving His blessing to Elias and Enoch, who continued there, and were still alive, He came to His disciples, who were in the large

* *Vid.* John, xiii. 1.

upper room on Mount Sion, with His Mother and others; and, showing Himself to them, He wished also before His departure to dine with them, in token of His loving remembrance of them, and of their common joy. Whilst then they were all eating together with great gladness at this last feast of their Lord, our Lord Jesus said to them, "It is time that I return to Him that sent Me; but do you remain here in this city, until you are endued with power from on high; for within a few days you shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, as I have promised you. Afterwards you shall go through the whole world preaching My Gospel, baptizing those who believe, and you shall be My witnesses even to the end of the earth." He also rebuked their unbelief, because they had not believed those who had seen Him rise, namely, His Angels. This He does at this time particularly, when He is speaking to them of preaching, as though He would give them to understand, "You ought to have believed the Angels, even before you saw Me, much more than the Gentiles to believe your preaching, which yet they will do, though they see Me not." He also did this, that, knowing their fault, they might remain more humble; thus showing them at His departure how pleasing to Him was humility, and that He might recommend it to them, as it were, in an especial manner. Upon their inquiring of Him concerning the times to come, He would give them no answer, because it was not profitable to them. Thus they continued eating and talking together, in great joy at the presence of their Lord, and yet troubled at the thought of His leaving them. For so very tenderly did they love Him, that they could not hear Him speak of going from them without heaviness and sorrow.

But what shall I say of His Mother, who sat next to Him, and who loved Him so intensely above all? Do

you not think that upon her Son's thus speaking of leaving them, touched to the heart, and moved with the tender affection of a mother's love, she reclined her head upon her Son and rested it upon His breast? For, if John did this at the last Supper, with much more reason may we believe that she did so now. With many sighs then and tears, she begged of Him, saying; "My Son, if Thou wilt indeed go, I pray Thee take me with Thee." But our Lord comforted her, saying; "I pray you, beloved Mother, grieve not at my departure; for I go to My Father." Our Lord then comforted His disciples and the Magdalene, and the other women, saying; "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. I will not leave you comfortless. I go away, and I will come to you, and I will be always with you." At length He said to them, that they should go to the Mount of Olives, for it was from thence that He would ascend, and then He disappeared from them. His Mother, then, and all the rest, without delay, went to the mountain which He had named to them, and which is about a league from Jerusalem, and there, again, our Lord appeared to them. Behold, on this day we have two different Appearances of our Lord. He then embraced His Mother, and bade her farewell, and His Mother most tenderly embraced Him. But the disciples, and the Magdalene, and all the rest fell down, and with many tears kissed His feet, and He lifting them up embraced His Apostles most lovingly. Contemplate them all now well, and all that takes place. Consider, also, the holy Fathers, who are present there, though invisibly, with what joy and reverence they regard our Lady, and with what affection they bless her, through whom they have received so great a blessing. Consider, also, how they look upon those

glorious champions and leaders of the divine army whom our Lord chose from amongst all, to conquer and subdue the whole world. At length, when all these mysteries were fulfilled, our Lord Jesus began to raise Himself up before them, and to ascend by His own power. Then His Mother and the others fell down upon the earth; and our Lady said, "My ever-blessed Son, I pray Thee remember me;" and at the thought of His departure she could not contain her tears; and yet great was her joy at beholding her Son thus gloriously ascend into heaven. In like manner His disciples also said; "O Lord, for Thy sake we have left all things; we pray Thee, be mindful of us." But He, lifting up His hands, with serene and joyful countenance, crowned with glory and adorned in royal apparel, was borne up triumphantly into heaven. And He blessed them, and said; "Be stedfast, and fight courageously, for I will be ever with you." Thus He ascended, leading with Him that noble and numerous company, opening a way to them, as the Prophet Micah had foretold. Thus passed our Lord before them and at their head,* arrayed in glorious light, resplendent in majesty, and with triumphant joy; and they followed Him with songs of praise and thanksgiving, and unspeakable jubilee, singing and saying; *O sing unto God, and sing praises unto His Name; magnify Him that rideth upon the heavens, as it were upon an horse; praise Him in His Name, Jah, and rejoice before Him.*† *O that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness, and declare the wonders that He doeth for the children of men.*‡ *Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, Thou that art the Saviour of them which put their trust in*

* *Vid.* Mic. ii. 13. † Ps. lxviii. 4. ‡ Ps. cvii. 8.

*Thee ;** bringing forth Thy people with joy, and Thy chosen with gladness.† *Set up Thyself, O God, above the heavens, and Thy glory above all the earth,‡ that Thy beloved may be delivered.§ Thou art gone up on high,* O God, who helpest us,‖ and bringest us out into a wealthy place ;¶ Thou bringest the prisoners out of captivity,** giving us the desire of our hearts. We will enter into Thine house, and sing to Thee in the presence of Thine Angels. Glory, praise, and honour be to Thee, O Christ, our King and Redeemer ! Sing to God, O ye Kingdoms of the earth, sing to God with a psalm of thanksgiving !

In the mean time, Michael, the leader of the heavenly host, going before, carried the joyful tidings of their Lord's ascending. And lo, the several companies of blessed Spirits advance, in order, to meet Him ; not one remains behind ; all come forth, and, bending before Him with the utmost reverence, conduct Him through the heavenly portals with hymns and canticles of inexpressible joy. Who can describe the songs with which they welcomed Him ? "Princes went before, joined with singers,"†† and said "Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia. Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord. Christ our King is come. Let us rejoice. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia. *Blessed art Thou,* O Lord, *that sittest upon the cherubim and beholdest the depths.*‡‡ Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia. Worthy art Thou, O Lord, of all honour and glory, Alleluia. For Thou hast triumphed gloriously, Alleluia. Let the heavens praise Thy wondrous works, Alleluia. And Thy power, Alleluia. Behold now the tribes go up,

* Ps. xvii. 7. † Ps. cv. 42. ‡ Ps. lvii. 6. § Ps. cviii. 6.
‖ Ps. lxviii. 18, 19. ¶ Ps. lxvi. 11. ** Ps. lxviii. 6.
†† *Vid.* Ps. lxviii. 25. Prævenerunt principes conjuncti psallentibus. Vulg. ‡‡ Song of the Three Children, v. 32.

even the tribes of the Lord,* Alleluia. To give thanks unto the Name of the Lord, Alleluia. To rejoice in the joy of Thy race, That thou mayest be praised with Thine inheritance. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia." With songs and thanksgivings like these did they honour their Lord, dividing themselves into two companies, and going before Him, and celebrating their august festival with all possible reverence. And who can recount their joy?

Who, again, the joy of all these blessed Spirits and holy Fathers on meeting together? For the heavenly host, when they had done homage to their Lord and ended their songs of joy, addressed the Fathers with the utmost gladness, saying; "O ye princes of the people, we greet you joyfully, Alleluia. For ye are joined to your God,† Alleluia. And are highly exalted, Alleluia. Sing ye to Him who hath ascended above the heaven of heavens, Alleluia, alleluia." Then the holy Fathers replied with alacrity, "O ye our lords, princes of the people, Alleluia. Our guardians and defenders, Alleluia. Joy to you and peace, Alleluia. Sing ye, also, to our King, Alleluia. Rejoice before God our Defender, Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia." Then, doing reverence to one another, they said together, "We go up with gladness into the house of the Lord,‡ Alleluia, alleluia. The City of God, the City of our solemnities,§ shall receive us together. We are the sheep of our Lord's pasture, let us go into His gates and enter into His courts,‖ Alleluia. With hymns and canticles, Alleluia. For the Lord of hosts is with us, Alleluia. He is our Defender,¶ Alleluia, alleluia." You see, then, how they all kept jubi-

* Ps. cxxii. 4. † *Vid.* Ps. xlvii. 9. ‡ Ps. cxxii. 1.
§ Is. xxxiii. 20. ‖ Ps. c. 2, 3.
¶ *Vid.* Ps. xlvi. 11. Susceptor. Vulg.

lee and sang hymns of thanksgivings. For, in the words of the prophet, God went up with a merry noise, and the Lord with the sound of the trump.* Our Lord Jesus ascended visibly for the greater comfort of His Mother and disciples, that they might see Him as far as they could. And lo! *a cloud received Him out of their sight,*† and in a moment He was in His country with all the Angels and the holy Fathers beforementioned. For thus saith the same prophet, *Who makest the clouds Thy chariot, and walkest upon the wings of the wind.*‡ By the wings of the wind are meant the edges of the wind, or those parts which go first, and are the swifter. He then ascended with fresh speed from the time when the cloud received Him out of their sight. Meanwhile His Mother and the disciples, and Magdalene, and the others, remained on their knees, and intently gazed upon Him, going up to heaven, as long as they could catch a sight of Him.

And O what a sight it was, to behold the Lord thus gloriously ascending! And what if any could have seen and heard the blessed Spirits and holy Souls as they went into heaven with Him! Perchance, such a soul would have burst the bonds of flesh and ascended with Him. And while they looked stedfastly up, *behold, two* Angels *stood by them in white apparel, and said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.*§ "Return then into the city and wait, as He told you." Here consider how full our Lord Jesus was of tender solicitude in their behalf. For no sooner

* Ps. xlvii. 5. † Acts, i. 9. ‡ Ps. civ. 3.
§ Acts, i. 10, 11.

had He vanished out of their sight than immediately He sent His Angels to them, that they might not be wearied of staying there, and that they might be strengthened on hearing the Angels' testimony that their Lord had ascended, according to His own word. On hearing these tidings from the Angels, our Lady humbly entreated them to commend her to her Son. Then they reverently made obeisance to her, and willingly received her commission. The Apostles, Magdalene, and all the rest, besought them in like words. Then they disappeared; and the blessed company returned into the city to Mount Sion, and there continued waiting, as our Lord Jesus had commanded them.

In the mean time, our Lord Jesus, with the whole of the forementioned august and happy company, having opened the gates of Paradise, which, till then, had been closed against mankind, passed through them in triumph, and took His seat at the right hand of His Father. Then all the holy Fathers, and most blessed spirits, who had fallen on their faces before the Eternal Throne, arose, and resumed their songs of victory and thanksgiving to God. For if Moses and the children of Israel, after the passage of the Red Sea, sang a hymn to God, saying, "Let us sing to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously;"* and Miriam, the prophetess, his sister, and her company, took timbrels in their hands, and sang to God with timbrels and with dances,† with how much more reason should they do it now, when all their adversaries were overcome! In like manner, when David brought the ark of the Lord to Jerusalem, the whole multitude of the children of Israel sang to the Lord in measured strains,‡ and David, in the midst of his singers, struck the harp, and all to-

* Exod. xv. 1. † Ib. 20. ‡ legitimè.

gether praised the Lord with their harps and timbrels, and David danced *before the Lord with all his might*;* how much more then did they now do it, when truly present with the Lord in the perfect enjoyment of so great happiness! And if St. John the Evangelist, as himself relates in the Apocalypse, heard a voice from heaven of an hundred and forty-four *harpers harping with their harps*,† and they sang, as it were, a new song before the Throne of God and of the Lamb; whatever that joy might signify, I cannot but piously imagine that it was more fully accomplished on this day than on any other. They all sing, they all rejoice, and exult with utmost jubilation, they all clap their hands, they all dance, and all with shouts of mirth leap for joy. Truly now in the heavenly Jerusalem is heard the song of joy, and all her streets echo with Alleluias. Never since the creation of the world was so solemn a feast celebrated, nor ever will be, except, perhaps, on the day of Judgment, when all the elect shall be presented in their glorious bodies. And therefore it was I said to you in the beginning, that this solemnity, considering all its circumstances, is greater than all others. Briefly take a view of each, and you will see whether what I say is true. A high and solemn Festival is the Incarnation of our Lord, and the source of all our good; but it is so for us, not for Him, for He was then shut up in the chamber of the Virginal womb. A great Festival also is that of His Nativity; but that also is for us. For we ought to compassionate Him, because He was born to so great poverty, contempt, and want. A great Solemnity in like manner, as regards us, is His Passion; because then all our sins were blotted out. For, as St. Gregory says, our birth had been no profit

* 2 Sam. vi. 5, &c. † Rev, xiv. 2, 3, &c.

to us, had we not profited by redemption; but on account of the most cruel torments, and most shameful death, which He endured, it neither was to Himself, nor ought it to be to us, a subject of joy and gladness. Moreover, a great, and solemn, and true Paschal Feast is the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus, as well for Himself as for us; for He appeared as a glorious and triumphant conqueror, and we were justified. Highly venerable therefore is it, and therefore on it alone the Church sings, "This is the Day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it," as St. Augustine remarks. But this present Day is holier than all the rest, as may be seen from the foregoing. For this day of the Ascension seems the greater and holier, since, although the Lord had risen, yet was He still a Stranger upon the earth; still was the gate of Paradise closed; still were the holy Fathers kept back from their country. But on the Ascension all was accomplished. And, if you look well, you will find that all which our Lord did up to this time He did as tending to this end, so that without this His works had all been incomplete. For heaven and earth, and all that is in them, were made for man; but man, for glory. Yet, till this day, none, however righteous, could attain to that glory, through effect of sin. You see, then, how magnificent and wonderful a day is this. Likewise also is Pentecost a high Festival, and one which the Church solemnizes with great joy. And rightly, since then she received that highest of gifts, even the Holy Spirit. Yet this was for us, and not for Him. But To-day, the day of the Ascension, is peculiarly the Festival, and that most solemn, of our Lord Jesus Christ; for to-day He began to sit at the Right Hand of His Father, and rested after His pilgrimage.

It is likewise the Festival, in an especial manner,

of all the heavenly Spirits, for they derive new joy from the sight of their Lord, whom they had not before seen among them in the form of Humanity. Moreover, to-day the fall of their brethren began to be repaired, and their ranks filled up by a mighty company of blessed Saints, and chiefly by all those illustrious patriarchs, prophets, and holy souls, who to-day first entered into their heavenly country. If, then, we account the passage of a single Saint to blessedness as a fit occasion for a festival, how much more the passage of all these thousands; yea, of the Saint of Saints Himself! A Festival too it is of our Lady, who on this day saw her Son exalted and encircled with a Kingly diadem, and ascending high above all as the true Lord of all. And yet, notwithstanding, it is especially our own Festival, since to-day our human nature was exalted above the heavens, and since, but for Christ's Ascension, we had never received that very Gift of the Holy Spirit, which we acknowledge with such devout solemnities. For He Himself said to His disciples, *It is expedient for you that I go away; for, if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you* * But, to give strength to my own words, I bring forward St. Bernard, who thus speaks of this day in his sermon on the Ascension of our Lord; "This solemnity, dearest brethren, is truly glorious. It is the sum and fulfilment of the other solemnities; the happy close of the sacred Itinerary of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. Worthily do we keep with joy and festivity the day on which the Sun above the heavens, the Sun of Righteousness, first presented Himself to our gaze. Great joy too it is, yea, gladness above measure, when, putting off the garment

* John, xvi. 7.

of sackcloth, and girding Himself with gladness,* He consecrated the first-fruits of our resurrection. Yet what have I to do with these solemnities, if I am still compelled to have my conversation on earth? I say, then, that the habitation of this banishment seems to me but little less intolerable than hell itself. Lastly, *If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you.* Do you observe how the Solemnity which we celebrate to-day forms the climax of all the rest, displays their fruit, and crowns their grace? For, as He who was born for us did all else for our good, in like manner His Ascension was accomplished for our good, and conduces to it."† Thus far St. Bernard. You see then evidently, that this day is more solemn than all others. And the soul which truly loves her Lord will rejoice more purely to-day than any day in the year. Accordingly He said to His disciples, *If ye loved Me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father.*‡ And for these reasons I think I said rightly, that no day was ever solemnized in our heavenly country like this: and this great jubilee was prolonged till the day of Pentecost. Now you may meditate on the occasion in the following manner. The Ascension of our Lord was at the hour of twelve, and, although the whole court of heaven made a general rejoicing in a manner beyond expression, yet, on the first day, till the same hour of the following, we may piously imagine that the Angels more particularly celebrated this joyful festival; and that our Lord Jesus showed them some especial marks of condescension and favour. And in the same manner, on the second day, the Archangels; on the third, the Principalities; on the fourth, the Powers; on the fifth, the Virtues; on the

* *Vid.* Ps. xxx. 12. † Serm. 2 et 4, in Asc. ‡ John, xiv. 28.

sixth, the Dominions; on the seventh, the Thrones; on the eighth, the Cherubim; and on the ninth, the Seraphim. These are the nine orders of Angels. And so they continued their joyful solemnity till the hour of twelve on the Saturday, or the Vigil of Pentecost. And then the holy Fathers kept the feast till nine on the Sunday morning.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE SENDING OF THE HOLY GHOST.

Then, when these things were all ended, the Holy Spirit, according to the promise of our Lord Jesus, straightway descended in likeness of tongues of fire upon the hundred and twenty disciples who were assembled together, and filled them with all joy.* Invigorated then and taught, enkindled and enlightened by His power, the disciples traverse the whole world, and in great part subject it to themselves. Nevertheless, the heavenly citizens continued afterwards to praise the Lord, and ever still continue, and celebrate days of joy, for never-ending is the festive solemnity, with thanksgiving, and the voice of praise. For it is written, *Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house, they will be always praising Thee.*† Let us too hasten to enter into that rest, where there is such unfailing and overflowing abundance of joy, and let us sigh after our country with all the powers of our souls. Let us hate the bands of this our miserable and corrupt body, and let us not bestow our thoughts and desires upon it, since it

* Acts, ii. † Ps. lxxiv. 4.

keeps us here in prison, and like pilgrims at a distance from such great happiness. Let us say then with the Apostle, *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* * And again; *Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.* † And again; *I desire to depart, and to be with Christ.* ‡ Let us desire that this body may be dissolved, and let us beg this continually of our Lord; for by ourselves we cannot obtain it together with our salvation. And again; Let us die at least to the world and to its lusts. Let us withdraw ourselves with a courageous and constant heart from these perishing objects, from the wretched and short-lived consolations of these visible things, which poison and wound our souls. Let us ascend in heart with our Lord, or rather to our Lord, that our conversation may be with Him in heaven. And, if we do this, we may trust that we shall not be always strangers and pilgrims, but in the time of His visitation He will vouchsafe to take us to Himself, He of whom we speak, even our Lord Jesus Christ, who is over all God blessed for ever, and to be praised for ever and ever. Amen.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

ON THE METHOD OF MEDITATING ON THE LIFE OF CHRIST, AND ON THE CONCLUSION OF THE WORK.

But I would, before concluding, give you a method which you may observe in meditating on the foregoing events.

* Rom. vii. 24. † 2 Cor. v. 6. ‡ *Vid.* Phil. i. 23.

You must know, then, that it is sufficient to meditate on what our Lord did, or what was done or said regarding Him, according to the Gospel history, by rendering yourself present at it, as if it took place before your eyes, and in such a manner as it naturally occurs to you to think of it from the account. You should choose, then, for using these meditations, some quiet time; and afterwards, during the day, you will be able to study the moral reflections and quotations, and carefully to commit them to memory. And this you ought to do by all means; for they are very beautiful, and are sufficient to instruct you, as it were, in the whole spiritual life. Make yourself as familiar as you can with the meditations; for, the more you do this, the more easy and the more pleasant will the use of them become. Take delight in conversing with our Lord JESUS, and study, in imitation of the blessed Cecilia, to keep His Life, like the Gospel, perpetually inshrined within your heart.

But it is now time to seal the book; which, however, I will do, not in my own words, but in the tender language of St. Bernard, from whom I have gathered for you already so many and such lovely flowers of devotion. My conclusion shall be in His Name, who is Himself the sealed Book, even our Lord JESUS CHRIST, to whose praise this whole book is dedicated. Thus speaks St. Bernard of that Blessed Name; "Thy Name is as oil poured out.* There is, doubtless, a resemblance between oil and the Name of the Spouse, and it is not without a mysterious meaning that the Holy Spirit has compared them together. And this, I think, is shown in the threefold properties of oil; of giving light, supporting, and anointing; unless you have any better interpretation; it feeds the fire,

* *Vid.* Song of Sol. i. 3.

nourishes the body, assuages pain, as light, as food, as medicine. Behold the same now in the Name of the Spouse; preached, It gives light; dwelt upon in meditation, It supports; invoked, It softens and anoints; and this we shall see if we touch upon each single point. Whence, think you, sprang forth throughout the whole world so wondrous and so sudden a light of faith, except from the preaching of JESUS? Was it not by the light of this Name that God called us *into His marvellous light?** to whom thus enlightened, and in this Light seeing light,† St. Paul truly says, *Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.*"‡ And again, "Nor is the Name of JESUS only Light, but it is also Food. Do you not feel yourself strengthened, as often as you remember it? What so enriches the soul that thinks of it? what so recruits the wearied senses, strengthens virtue, gives life to all that is good and noble, cherishes all chaste affections? All food of the soul is dry, if this oil be not poured over it; tasteless, if it be not seasoned with this salt. Whatever you write, it has no relish for me, unless I read there JESUS. Whatever you say in dispute or conference, it has no relish for me, unless it speak of JESUS. The Name of JESUS is honey in the mouth, music in the ear, jubilee in the heart; yea, and It is medicine to the soul. Is any of you sad? Let JESUS come into his heart, and spring straightway to his tongue. And, lo! at the first rising of the light of His holy Name, every cloud is scattered, and the clear sky returns. Does any fall into sin, does he run into the snare of death by despair? If he call on the Name of JESUS, shall he not instantly breathe and live again? Who, in the presence of this saving Name, has ever been able to persist in hardness of

* 1 Peter, ii. 9. † Ps. xxxvi. 9. ‡ Eph. v. 8.

heart, in torpor of sloth, rancour of hatred, or languor of indifference? Who, when the fountain of his tears has been dried up, has not, on calling on the Name of JESUS, found it straightway gush forth more plentifully, and flow more sweetly? Who, when trembling with alarm in danger, has not by calling on this Name of power, found confidence at once restored, and fear driven away? Who, I ask, when agitated and tossed by doubts, has not, upon invoking this glorious Name, beheld at once the light of faith break forth? Who, when tempted to distrust in adversity, has failed to find courage at the sound of this Name of succour? These are the diseases and languors of the soul, and this their appointed Medicine. Nor is it difficult to prove this. *Call upon Me,* He says, *in the time of trouble; so will I hear thee, and thou shalt praise Me.** Nothing so checks the violence of anger, allays the swelling of pride, heals the wound of envy, restrains the flow of wantonness, extinguishes the fire of lust, slakes the thirst of covetousness, and puts to flight the temptation to every impure affection. For, when I name JESUS, I represent to myself the Man meek and lowly, and of a loving heart, sober, chaste, pitiful; in a word, conspicuous for all purity and holiness, and at the same time Himself the Almighty God; who, while He heals us by His example, strengthens us by His aid. All this speaks to my heart, as soon as the Name of JESUS sounds in my ear. I take then to myself His example from His humanity, and succour from His almighty power; the one as a kind of compound, to which, by means of the other, I impart a peculiar pungency; and of these I make a sovereign healing confection, the like to which no physician could ever form. This electuary thou hast,

* Ps. l. 15.

O my soul, laid up for thee in the little vessel of this holy Name of JESUS. JESUS is truly a name replete with health, which thou shalt ever find most powerful to heal thee in every plague. Let it be ever in thy heart, ever in thy hand; that so all thy senses and actions may be directed to JESUS. And hear how thou art invited; *Set Me as a seal upon thy heart; as a seal upon thine arm.** But of this I will speak elsewhere. Here then thou seest where thou mayest find a healing balsam both for thy heart and for thine arm. Thou hast, I say, in the Name of JESUS, the means either to correct thy bad actions, or to perfect those which are defective; and also either to preserve thy senses from corruption, or, if corrupted, to heal them."† Again; "How beauteous art Thou to Thine Angels, Lord JESU, in the form of God, in the day of Thine eternity, in the splendour of Thy Saints, begotten before the morning-star, Brightness and express Image of the Substance of the Father, everlasting and ineffable Splendour of eternal life! How beautiful art Thou to me, my Lord, in the very laying aside of this Thy beauty! For truly when Thou didst empty Thyself, when Thou didst divest of its essential glory Thine unfailing light, then did Thy tender pity break forth with fairer lustre, then did Thy love shine forth with new glory, and Thy grace with brighter rays. How dear art Thou in Thy rising, Thou Star of Jacob! ‡ how lovely, Thou Flower that comest forth from the root of Jesse! § how pleasant the light with which Thou hast visited me as I sit in darkness, Thou Day-spring from on high! how fair, yet how wondrous, in Thy heavenly power and mighty acts, in Thy

* Song of Sol. viii. 6.
† Serm. 15, in Cantic.
‡ Numb. xxiv. 17.
§ *Vid.* Is. xi. 1.

Conception of the Holy Ghost, in Thy Birth of the Virgin, in the innocence of Thy Life, in the streams of Thy Doctrine, in the marvellous light of Thy Miracles, in the revelations of Thy Sacraments! Lastly, how resplendent, after Thy setting, Thou Sun of Righteousness, dost Thou rise again from the heart of the earth! how glorious in Thine apparel! At length, O King of Glory, Thou returnest into the highest heavens; and how can it be but that for all these things all my bones should say; O Lord, who is like unto Thee?* Such, I think, were the thoughts with which the spouse regarded her Beloved, when she said; *Behold, Thou art fair, my Love; behold, Thou art fair.*† Nor with these thoughts alone, but doubtless with others also, of His Divine Beauty, which altogether baffle our sight and escape our grasp. The repetition of the words denotes the beauty of both Substances." ‡ Thus far St. Bernard. Thanks be to GOD that liveth for ever and ever. Amen.

* *Vid.* Ps. xxxv. 10. † Song of Sol. i. 15. ‡ Serm. 45, in Cantic.

THE END.

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